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THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH

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THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH

BY

CAPEL VANE

"The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow"

SHELLEY

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1895

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Dedicated

TO MY FRIEND

LETTIE PHILLIMORE,

WHOSE SYMPATHETIC INTEREST IN THE STORY FROM ITS BEGINNING

ENCOURAGED ME TO CONTINUE AND COMPLETE IT.

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THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE PICTURE IN THE GARRET.

THE wind was roaring in the chimneys and the leafless branches of the trees were rattling against the walls of the house with a wild rush as the gusts swept by.

Luigia, at the nursery window, had looked out into the dreary solitude of the park, and watched the dead leaves whirling on the lawn so long, that something of the melancholy of that wet, tempestuous, winter's day had entered into her heart, and she felt vaguely unhappy. She turned and looked around her. Her nurse, Fanny, had gone into the inner room to chat with Mrs. Dawes, the old woman who sometimes came up from the village to make Luigia's frocks. She was alone, and there was nothing particular to do. In a moment she had taken her resolution and run away—up to that mysterious region of garrets at the top of the house, where all was dust and cobwebs, and solitude, and dim light.

That dozen or so of garrets were a never-failing source of interest and delight to Luigia. The miscellaneous lumber that had collected there during years was a mine of untold wealth to the solitary child. It was charming to lift the lid of some box and grope among its contents, bringing to light many a forgotten remnant of brocade and quaintly cut garment; a broken, old-fashioned toy that had belonged to some child years ago; a mildewed photograph album full of faded, dead faces of people who had once perhaps lived in that very house, trodden those very rooms.

Then the books—how many there were of them!—books of every sort and description, both old and new, both English and foreign. But the pictures were open stories to all beholding eyes, and over these she would pore in the dusky light, weaving tales around them of happy people and sunny gardens such as she loved. And she thought about them again when she went to bed at night, peopling the solitary house with creatures of her imagination, and living a second inner life that was both richer and fuller than the realities of her existence. Truly Luigia in her loneliness was better off for companionship than many a less imaginative child who belongs to a large family of brothers and sisters.

It was very cold in the garrets, but there was an old tablecloth that did duty as a shawl, and wrapped in this, with her feet tucked under her frock to keep them warm, she could spend many an hour by herself in a mood of mysterious happiness. The tablecloth was now dusty and tattered, but it had once been gorgeous, and Luigia liked it because it was scarlet and had a gold thread running through it. It had come from some foreign land originally, and years ago she remembered it on a table in the drawing-room, where as a child she had sat on the floor beside it and regarded its golden birds of Paradise with respectful awe. Now it was banished to the garret, and she no longer worshipped it at a distance, but wrapped it round her and made it serve her as a familiar friend. The beautiful gleaming thing was but a rag, the birds of Paradise were tarnished, the wonder of it was gone, and she used it or threw it aside without respect.

Wrapped in this gorgeous Eastern rag, she defied the cold, and enjoyed herself thoroughly after a strange, solitary fashion of her own. After gazing at a picture in a lengthy and absolute abstraction she would toss back her hair as though seeking freedom from restraint, and, looking up into the wintry sky, give free vent to her imagination. Every shade of feeling through which she passed was expressed in those great, dark, un-English eyes of hers, and perhaps also in the mouth, which was large too. But there

was no one to see or even to guess at the hopes and longings that filled her heart, and she was never either disturbed or interfered with when up there.

If all other sources of interest failed her there were still the fairies to watch for. How many hours had she not spent in crouching behind some box or peeping through a half-open door in the hope of catching a fairy at its gambols! What old, fantastic creatures might not come skipping out of the dim corners into the half light in the centre of the room! What frolics might they not have chasing one another round and about the old furniture! But in all the ten years of her life there was only one solitary instance of good luck with regard to fairies, and that was one day when on entering a room suddenly a little creature sprang down from the top of a chest and disappeared behind a screen. She had told Fanny, her nurse, about it, and Fanny had said it was a mouse, but of course Luigia did not choose to believe this, and many a day after that she had waited, cramped and motionless, in some dark corner for a glimpse of the fairy creature that never came again.

To-day, however, it was to what she called the "Book Room" that she went. It was dark and gloomy, for ivy straggled over its window-panes, and dust lay thickly on the floor and on everything she touched. In one corner a number of books were lying in a neglected heap, and it was here that she sat herself to poke, and push, and gaze, and dream—dream over the glimpses of far-away worlds that came to her from their pages.

They had evidently been flung there by a careless and irreverent hand, and had lain in neglect for years. The covers were bent, the pages loosened, dog's-eared, torn. And yet many of them were of handsome binding, with gilt-edged leaves. She had seen books far less new and pretty in her father's library, and she wondered why these were abandoned to neglect. They were mostly written in a language she did not understand, but they all bore the same name in the fly-leaf, "*Francesca Luigia Daubigny.*" Luigia speculated over this name. Her own was Luigia Daubigny, but she had never heard of any one called *Fran-*

cesca before. She turned over the pages curiously. In one there was a dead rose staining the page with a yellow mark, and where it lay there was a sentence underlined in pencil. In another there was a harebell and a poor crushed gnat—a voiceless testimony to some summer-day's reading in the far-away past when the book had been hastily closed—why? Luigia wondered about it, who had been reading at that page, who had picked the harebell, and what the story was about? But there was no answer to these questions, and she laid it aside for something that could tell her more.

What was this, shining among the books deep down? Something bright and glittering, something she had never noticed before. She dug for the treasure, and brought it to light. It proved to be a picture, an oil painting in a gilt frame. She dragged it to the window, and knelt down before it. It was dim and dusty, and she wiped it with her frock; the frame was tarnished and broken in places, as though it had been roughly knocked about. But the face that smiled out at her from the canvas—was it not beautiful?

It was the portrait of a lady in a pale satin gown, with blood-red roses at her breast and in her hair. There was a guitar in her hands, and her lips were just parting with song. Her eyes were uplifted—soft, beautiful, melancholy. Her hair was black and her face pale, but her lips were red—red as the roses she wore at her breast. Luigia was fascinated, and almost held her breath as she looked at it. Where had she seen a lovely face like that? Long ago when she was quite a baby, perhaps, or perhaps only in dreams. Yes, it must have been in dreams, for she had never had a mother, and no lady visitor at her father's house was ever half so beautiful. She fell into a reverie, wrapping the shawl more closely round her, and leaning back against the wall with her wild black hair tossed in confusion around her.

As four o'clock clanged from the stable clock, she remembered the nursery tea in waiting for her, and scrambling to her feet, she lugged the picture into some safe hiding-place for the night. In doing this something

scrawled in red paint on its canvas back caught her eye. She stooped, and with her little dusky forefinger pointing to each letter in turn, spelt out the name—"*Francesca Luigia Daubigny.*"

Then it was this beautiful lady to whom all those books had belonged! it was she who had picked the harebell and pressed the rose! Who was she?—with the name that was partly her own. Could it—could it be her dead mother, whom no one ever mentioned? Luigia went down to tea full of excited hopes and doubts.

Tea was in full swing when she entered the nursery, and Fanny and old Mrs. Dawes, with their toes on the fender, were gossiping together over their hot buttered toast. They both turned their heads as she entered.

"So there you are at last, Miss Luigia!" cried Fanny. "Come and sit down at once and have your tea. We've pretty nigh done ours. Whatever have you been about?"

Luigia did not choose to say. She closed her lips with a determined air, and sat herself down on the stool that was placed for her. A slice of bread and butter was given her, while her companions went on with their hot buttered toast, and conversed without further noticing her.

Mrs. Dawes was a hook-nosed old lady with horn-rimmed spectacles, and a pair of noiseless list slippers, in which she had a habit of coming upon one unawares. Luigia did not like her; partly perhaps because she was chiefly connected in her mind with "trying on" stiff new garments bristling with pins, exactly at the moment when she longed to be doing something else. But she was not averse to gossip, and enjoyed listening to tales of any sort—even when they were about the model children Mrs. Dawes had known when she was young. But, if the truth were told, she preferred a tale of a more tragic cast, and was never tired of hearing Mrs. Parsons, the housekeeper, discourse about the young man who drowned himself in the eel-pond for her sake, and of how Fanny's baker threw up the bakery and took to housebreaking when she refused him, going headlong to the gallows in a false beard and wax nose. Many were the bits of foolish gossip and

vulgar scandal that had been discussed over Luigia's unregarded head, and long before she was ten years old she was deep in servants' lore, and viewed the ways of the world through their eyes. No one put a stop to this state of things, for the master of the house was often absent, and, even when living at home, seemed scarcely aware of the existence of his neglected child. There was no mistress at the Hall, and under Mr. Daubigny's rule, which was a very lax one, every kind of extravagance had become habitual, and bad ways were continued without interference from any one.

The nurse and the old workwoman were revelling in strong tea and details of the death-bed agonies of all their friends and relations, when at the first pause in the conversation Luigia interrupted with an abrupt question.

"Who was Francesca Luigia Daubigny?" she inquired, looking earnestly from one face to the other.

Mrs. Dawes stared at her with a blaze of amazement in her spectacles; Fanny set down her cup with a jerk. They exchanged significant glances and an ominous silence ensued.

"Who was she?" persisted Luigia.

"Who was she?" repeated Fanny; "why, isn't that your own name? You never heard of nobody else called that, did you?"

"I don't mean me," returned Luigia, shaking her head; "I mean somebody quite grown up—a lady, a beautiful lady, with roses and red lips, smiling."

"Somebody's been a-talking to the child in a way they oughtn't," said Mrs. Dawes, "that's evident."

"Well, anyways it isn't me," cried Fanny. "I haven't breathed a word, I declare!"

"Who was she?" Luigia broke in again.

"Little gells shouldn't ask questions," said Mrs. Dawes, severely. "Master Frankie and Miss Carry never asked no questions—never!"

"What's put it into the child's head?" exclaimed Fanny aside, but in a tone distinctly audible to Luigia's ears. "It isn't likely as any one would go and tell her about her mamma."

"Was she my mamma?" demanded Luigia.

Mrs. Dawes' spectacles blazed afresh at this audacious questioning; Fanny turned upon her with a sudden solemnity.

"Don't you never speak about your mamma," she said. "She's not to be spoke about—leastways by little gells."

"Why?"

"Don't you ask me no more questions. If you do, the Black Man will come down the chimbley and carry you off and keep you in a cage till you're fit to eat."

This threat was pronounced in a suitable manner by sinking the voice to an awful whisper, but Luigia felt no thrill of horror. She had heard it many a time before, and defied it, and no Black Man had ever come to seize her. But she asked no more questions concerning the beautiful lady; she was too proud to do that, and she finished her tea in silence. But she knew well enough by the ominous signs and whispers that had passed between the two that there was some mystery in connection with the mother whom no one ever mentioned to her.

That night after she had gone to bed she lay awake watching the firelight flickering through the open door from the room beyond. Over that fire Fanny and Mrs. Dawes were sitting gossiping as they had gossiped more or less all day. Fragments of the conversation came to her ears at intervals, but at others their voices sank into whispers or were drowned by the roaring of the wind in the chimney tops.

It was a wild night. The window was closely shuttered and the room was warm and cosy, but she could hear the storm raging outside. The wind as it came moaning through the trees and crept round the house seemed to her like the sobbing of some lost child, and once or twice she started up in bed and listened with dilated eyes to these cries of desolation. But it died away again, and she lay down once more, comforted by the silence that followed. Then came the whispering voices from the other room, rising and falling as the flickering firelight rose and fell on the wall at her bedside. What was that they were say-

ing? Was it not her own name? She lay motionless and listened.

"Strange as Miss Luigia should ask them questions about her mamma!" Fanny's voice was saying. "I wonder who's been a-talking to her."

"She don't remember her, I suppose?" came in Mrs. Dawes' voice.

"Not she. Why, she weren't three year old when it happened."

"Ah, that was before ever I came to the place. I never saw Mrs. Daubigny. Was she as handsome as they make out?"

"My word! wasn't she, though! And yet it wasn't only her looks, but a way with her as sent people silly—leastways gentlemen. The master he just worshipped the ground she stepped on, and it fairly broke his heart, it did."

"And *him*—the other one? What was *he* like?"

"Oh, he was a thin dark gentleman, with great black eyes as seemed to draw the soul out of your body like. He was Italian, too, like the mistress, and he made love to her before ever she was married. It was pretty clear how things was going long before the master seemed to see anythink, but of course no one didn't like to warn him."

"Was there much carryings on, then?"

"I should just think there was—though they was pretty careful considering. But I've seen her turn back on the staircase and give him *such* a look—as he was a-waiting in the hall below and the master not two paces off in the smoking-room—a look as made him go up after her with some pretence, and then there was more carryings on, on the landing. And another time when I was out in the shrubbery I saw them leaning together in the drawing-room window, and she'd got a rose in her hand, and he was asking her for it, as I could make out by the way they was talking, and at last she gave it to him, and he went mad with kissing it, and in the very middle she turns round with a smile as cool as you please to the master, who was coming through the room behind them. Oh, she knew how to hoodwink him, she did!"

"How did he take it when she went off?"

"My word! that was a night! We was all distracted; but the master, he seemed to know without being told somehow. When he came home—for he'd been away two days—we was all in a state of mind, not knowing what to do. We didn't speak, and he went into the dining-room, where dinner was laid, and then he went upstairs to her room. It was empty, but her things was all lying about as she'd left them in her hurry. In ten minutes or so down he came again and went in to dinner, and the men said as he went through all the courses and drank his wine as usual. He seemed so calm and unconcerned like, that we all thought as he couldn't possibly know what had really happened, so after dinner Mrs. Parsons took Miss Luigia by the hand, dressed in her best frock, and went into the dining-room. There he was a-sitting over the fire, with his head buried in his hands; but directly he heard her he got up and stood with his back to the fire, and held up his head as proud as ever and asked her what she wanted. Mrs. Parsons told him as she'd got bad news for him, but before she could get out the words, 'I know it,' says he, very haughty-like; 'you can save yourself the trouble.' Then Mrs. Parsons began to say somethink else, but he stopped her. 'You can go,' says he, 'and take the child with you. Let me never see her again;' and he strode over to the door and opened it for her, and afterwards shut it and locked it, and sat there alone all the rest of the evening, with the dessert and nothink cleared away."

Luigia listened intently. She did not grasp the full significance of the story, but she understood enough. It was her mother they were talking about—that unknown mother whom she had always believed dead—and she had run away in the night with a man, whose big black eyes drew the souls out of people's bodies against their will. Her mother had done a wicked, cruel thing, and broken her father's heart. So much she understood. But hush! the voices are whispering together again.

"It's not likely as Miss Luigia will turn out well, considering what her mother was," Fanny was saying, with an inflection of dark prophecy in her tones.

"No, to be sure," sighed Mrs. Dawes; and Luigia saw the shadow of her on the wall shake its head ominously. "That's true enough!"

"She's got the same way with her sometimes—as I could fancy it was the mistress over again. And her eyes! they're as like as like can be—swimming in tears one minute, and that mischievous the next, you feel you can scarce keep your hands off boxing her ears."

"She's not what you'd call a pretty child—not like Miss Mabel at the Vicarage, all a mask o' golden curls."

"That's true. She's too dark and furrin-looking to be a pretty child. She's not to *my* taste, either. And as for furriners—there's no trusting them; they're always up to somethink as you don't suspeck. It wouldn't surprise me—not one bit, if she goes the way her mother did. She's got it in her blood, and it'll come out in the bone, you mark my words and see if it don't!"

"I shouldn't wonder—I shouldn't wonder!" muttered Mrs. Dawes, and the shadow on the wall wagged its head more ominously than ever.

Luigia listened and wondered. What was this wicked thing she was going to do when she grew up? What did the dark prophecy mean? She did not know, but her little heart beat fast with a vague fear.

The firelight rose and fell, and the whisperings and the mutterings went on, and the shadow heads on the wall nodded darkly, warningly, prophetically as Luigia watched them with dilated, frightened eyes.

And the wind went sobbing round the house, sobbing and wailing with anguish; and louder and louder it rose, till suddenly, wildly, with a shriek like the cry of a lost soul, it rushed through the barren trees and away into outer darkness, where it sank with a piteous moan into silence.

Luigia lay shuddering and stopping her ears.

CHAPTER II.

LUIGIA'S FATHER.

LUIGIA regarded her father with a childish sort of hero-worship, though she never remembered to have had a kind word from him. On the occasions when they met by accident in the grounds or on the stairs, he often passed her as though he had not seen her, but for all that her interest in him grew and strengthened day by day. Neglected weeds often flourish more luxuriantly than the carefully tended hothouse flowers, and so it was with her love for her father. He had always been an object of deep interest to her, partly because he belonged so closely to her, and yet seemed scarcely to own her, and partly because he was in himself the kind of man who would naturally attract a child's admiration. He was handsome and generous and carelessly good-natured—to all but Luigia. She had seen him lift the little girl at the lodge into the saddle before him, and laugh when she screamed with delight. She had seen him pat the head of the boy who held his horse, and give him half a crown for his trifling service. She had seen his dog receive the caresses that were denied to her, who had far more right to them. She had always, as long as she could remember, watched and admired him in secret, but now that she had been told the story of her mother's desertion, she dedicated herself to him with an even more absolute devotion. The picture in the lumber-room was kept with its face to the wall in disgrace, and she denied herself the pleasure of looking at it again.

"I hate you!" she cried, standing in the middle of the room and addressing the picture with a scowl of disapproval. "I hate you for leaving papa. I shall not turn you round. I shall not look at you. I shall not call you pretty any more."

A new hope and a new project entered into her mind—she was bent upon making her father care for her. She did not know how she was to do it, but it had to be done some-

how. She watched him more closely than ever, and waited her opportunity.

On the great staircase there were niches at intervals in the wall, in which marble statues were placed on pedestals. Around the base of these pedestals ferns and flowering shrubs were arranged in luxuriant profusion. It was behind one of these figures, the figure of Psyche, that Luigia generally hid herself when watching for her father to go down to dinner. She could see him come along the gallery above, watch him down the whole sweep of stairs, and across the hall, till he disappeared through the dining-room door. This was a treat, the extent of which can hardly be realized. It delighted her to see how proudly he walked, and how handsome he looked, and to know that he was her own father and belonged to her more than to any one else in the world. She would peep round the pedestal, and through the delicate leaves of the ferns with a breathless awe and delight, that it is certain very few children feel even for the father who spends himself in their service, and from whom they are sure of having love and caresses.

One evening Luigia noticed that her father wore a white camelia in his coat, and this fact suggested an idea to her. She would present him with a flower every day as he passed down to dinner, so that he should not have the trouble of picking one for himself.

The next morning she slipped into the conservatories, and hovered among the flowers, anxious and undecided as to which to choose. Perhaps he did not like geraniums and roses and lilies, and no doubt he was tired of camelias. It was a difficult matter to decide.

While peering about on tip-toe, and gently bending down first one blossom and then another, she saw a gardener enter with a watering-can. She went up to him.

"Which is my father's favourite flower?" she demanded.

"Don't know," replied the man. "I 'speeks they're all alike to him; he doesn't come nigh 'em once in a month. If I let half on 'em die he wouldn't be any the wiser."

"Oh, but he *does* like flowers. He wore one in his but-

ton-hole last night at dinner. I want to give him one to-night—one that smells nice."

"You can't pick any o' these," said the man, gruffly, showing little respect for his master's neglected child. "You be off, and let the things alone. I can't have 'em interfered with."

"They are father's flowers, not yours," said little Miss Daubigny, very proudly.

"I know that, and that's why I won't have 'em picked. You be off afore you're caught, Miss Luigia, or you'll get a fine scolding. The nursery's the place for you."

She walked away with an air of offended dignity, without vouchsafing a reply. If Robert was so disagreeable, she must find a flower for herself in the garden. Accordingly she spent the morning in the Beech Wood, where she managed to gather a handful of early violets after prolonged search. Unfortunately they were dog-violets, and had no scent. This was a drawback, but they were the best to be had, and with them she was obliged to be content. On coming home she put them in water in a white-and-gold mug the cook had once given her, and awaited the evening with impatience.

It came at last. Seven o'clock struck, the gong sounded, and Luigia, in her concealment behind the statue, felt her heart beat loud and fast. She craned her neck over the top of a tall fern, and peeped through the thick blossoms of a white azalea. She heard steps and voices approaching, and on the gallery above appeared her father and another gentleman in conversation together.

Here was a dilemma! She had not expected any witness to her interview. Her resolution was put to flight; her heart beat faster than ever, and she drew still further back into the shadow of the statue. Should she not let him pass without giving him the flowers? Would it not be better than risking his anger in the presence of a stranger? She hesitated, and again peeped through the azalea leaves. He was coming down the stairs; there was a smile on his lips, and no flower in his button-hole. The gentleman at his side did not look particularly alarming; in fact, quite the

reverse. In a moment she had taken her resolution, and, as the two gentlemen passed the place of her concealment, she came forth and stood mutely before them, holding out the bunch of violets with a trembling hand and downcast eyes.

They stopped, and the stranger, who was elderly, catching the other by the arm, exclaimed—

"What's this apparition, Daubigny? Who is this little creature, this sprite of the woods, with her black elf locks and wild flowers?"

"What do you want?" said Daubigny to Luigia, without replying to his friend's remark.

"I got these for you," she said shyly, holding out the flowers. "They don't smell, but camelias don't smell either."

A dark flush had swept into Daubigny's proud face at first sight of the child, and he now appeared both confused and undecided what to do. He, who was celebrated for his ease of manner and courtly grace, and who had many a time received elegant tokens of favour from high-born and beautiful women, now accepted, with evident embarrassment, a bunch of wild violets from the hand of his little daughter. He took them awkwardly, dropping some upon the stairs as he did so, and passed on without a word. She never knew whether he put them into his coat or not, for she was in bed long before he left the dining-room, and on questioning the servants next day could gather no satisfactory information.

However, she did not consider the attempt had been altogether a failure, and determined to proceed with her plot. This time she promised herself the flower should be really worth accepting, and accordingly summoned up all her wiles wherewith to storm the hard heart of Robert, the gardener.

He was at his usual morning's work in the conservatories when she went to look for him. She went straight up to him, and slipped her hand into his.

"Robert," she said, laying her cheek against the hard, horny hand caressingly, "I want you to pick me that rose—that yellow one hanging down."

"Hey!" said the gardener, with a reluctant smile stealing

over his face, "you're a-trying to coax me over. *I* know your artful ways." But he did not shake her off.

"If you do," said Luigia, still caressing his hand softly, "I will fill your watercans and carry your basket *all* the morning."

"And a fine state o' muck you'd be in at the end o' it! There! there! let go my hand, Miss Luigia. Which one was it as you said you wanted?"

She led him to a rose tree which clambered up the wall of the conservatory, and pointed to a beautiful, half-open, yellow bud. He broke it off and gave it to her.

She put up her arms suddenly as he bent down, held him by the neck, and gave him a fluttering, butterfly kiss; then she danced away, and he stooped again over his work.

"Just like her mother over again!" he muttered to himself—"the same way o' getting round you in spite of yourself. Ah, what a pretty creature she was, to be sure! and so fond o' flowers! It was worth lookin' after the conservatories in her day, while the master never comes nigh 'em except to smoke. What a pretty creature she was, poor thing! I'll never believe as she was to blame. It was all along o' that rascally furriner with his big moustaches."

That evening Luigia again concealed herself behind the statue of Psyche, and awaited the sounding of the gong. She was not so timid on this occasion, having suffered no repulse the day before. It gave her pleasure to think he had even carried her flowers into dinner with him.

Soon after the ringing of the gong, Daubigny and the gentleman she had seen with him before began to descend the stairs. She came out of her hiding-place and held up her offering.

"Here is a rose," she said.

Her father was about to pass her without noticing her, but his companion seized her by the wrist and held her tightly, looking down on her with a smile of amusement.

"Why, here's the same little flower-maiden, I declare! What a lucky fellow you are, Daubigny, to be waylaid in this manner! I vow I should be vastly flattered!"

Her father had passed them by a step or two, and was waiting with a frown of impatience.

"Come," he said coldly, "we have no time to lose if we mean to keep our appointment."

"Let her come in to dinner with us," said the other gentleman—"as a favour to me. I've quite fallen in love with her eyes."

"Do not ask me," said Daubigny, in a low voice, turning away with sudden agitation; "it would be excessively painful to me. I—I cannot explain——"

He moved on as he spoke, and reached the bottom of the stairs without looking back. His friend hurried after him, and linked his arm in his. She heard him saying, "I beg your pardon—I had no idea——" and she saw her father waive aside the subject with a movement of his hand. Then they both disappeared, and the dining-room door was shut behind them.

She was left with the rose dangling in her hand by its thorny stem. She gazed at the closed door as though she could scarcely realize what had befallen her, but the next instant she had torn the petals from the rose and flung them from her with passionate violence, stamping on their soft, scented leaves as though they were living things that had done her some mortal injury. Leaving them scattered and crushed on the staircase, she rushed off to her own room, where it was dark, and threw herself down on the floor in an agony of tears.

"He hates me! he hates me!" she moaned again and again. "What shall I do? oh, whatever shall I do?"

Benumbed, shivering, and worn out with excitement, she was found there an hour later by Fanny, the nurse. She refused to give the slightest reason for her unhappiness, and repressed her sobs with an effort as long as the girl was in the room. But, after she had left her for the night, she lay quiet and still in the dark room, hugging her rag doll closely to her and gazing up at the moon in the cold, night sky. There were no more sobs, no more passionate exclamations, but every now and then a large tear

welled up from the bottom of her heart, so it seemed, and ran down on to the ugly face of the rag doll.

The wound had gone very deep, and she was beyond all power of consolation. No more flowers were offered to Daubigny on his way down to dinner after that cruel rejection, and he sat at the head of his table, cold and proud, with no decoration in his button-hole and no little daughter at his side.

CHAPTER III.

THE DAWNING OF GENIUS.

Luigia worshipped her father as a hero, and surrounded him with an atmosphere of romance, but there was yet another passion that held almost as strong a hold over her. This was music. She inherited her love of it from her mother, who had been the daughter of a famous opera-singer in Italy, and who was herself in training for the stage when Daubigny fell in love with and married her. With Luigia everything combined to suppress the art, but it was born in her and was so entirely a part of her nature that no difficulties and neglect had power to kill it.

It first stirred within her when, as a young child, she listened outside the drawing-room to some one playing and singing within. She scarcely knew whether the feeling the music woke in her made her happy or miserable, but it certainly filled her with indefinite longings that she would have found it impossible to express in words. The next day every moment was an hour till she could escape to the drawing-room and pick out for herself the air she had heard. She liked to be there alone; she liked the big piano; she liked to shut and lock the door and feel herself mistress of the place and hour.

It was a large room, with windows leading into a conservatory, and furniture swathed in holland by the careful housemaids. Near one of the windows stood the piano, and before it Luigia would seat herself. The air had first to be

picked out with one finger, then a bass put to it, then chords attempted, and a struggle after harmony. But it often ended in dismal failure, and she would stamp her feet and clench her hands and rush away in an agony of rage and despair.

She was a strange child and seemed to carry her history —a tragic one, full of passionate feeling, desolation, and neglect—in her face. She was excessively pale, and there were great black shadows under her eyes—shadows that spoke of sleepless nights spent in vain imaginings that gave her mind no rest. Her mouth was large, soft, tremulous, and drooped pitifully at the corners; her long, silky black hair twined and clung like waterweeds floating in a stream. She was incomprehensible to the servants, who had no understanding of her silent ways, sudden fits of passion, and strange sayings.

"I don't care," she used to say when she was punished for some childish misdemeanour—"I don't care. I live in Fairyland. You think I'm standing in the corner, but I'm not. I'm in Fairyland all the time."

Then they would look at her strangely and whisper together, and call her "odd" and prophesy a dark future for her, shaking their heads with mysterious references to her mother. And she would listen and shake her own little head, and defy them and their punishments, and go on living in Fairyland, the land of her imagination, where all things happened after the desire of her heart, and she was loved and cherished as other and happier children were.

Once a lady, who sang beautifully, came to stay in the house with her father. Every evening after dinner, and long after Luigia had been put to bed, the refrain of her song came floating up through the darkness of the house to her listening ears. Then she would creep downstairs with bare feet, run through the boudoir, and crouch in the dark near the door into the drawing-room, which was often ajar. There she could hear the words of the song, "Knowest thou the land where the citron-flower blooms?" Again and again, in high, ringing notes came the question, but there never was any answer. Outside, in the darkness,

she listened breathless. It spoke to her of far-off lands, where wonderful things such as she had never seen grew, a land radiant with light and warmth and brilliant birds and flowers. The thought delighted her; she went about in a day-dream, full of imaginings. When she was sure of not being observed, she stole into the drawing-room, and picked out the air for herself. It was the high, ringing notes that had especially fascinated her, but on the piano they would not come. There was a poverty, a feebleness, a flatness about it all that filled her with despair. and she ended by creeping under the piano and bedewing the carpet with fruitless tears.

"What is citron?" she asked her nurse one evening as she was being undressed.

"Citron, Miss Luigia? why, it's the peel stuff a-top o' the cakes as gives you toothache."

"I don't believe it," said Luigia, flatly.

"You're a bad, disbelieving child, then!" returned the nurse. "You're always a-askin' questions and never a-believin' of the answers. But there now! if I don't know. candy-peel, I shall be a-wonderin' what my own nose is next. You get into bed, and don't go askin' so many questions." And with a shake, not unkindly meant, she thrust her charge between the sheets, and took away the light.

This was a great blow to the brilliance of Luigia's imagination. That the lovely song should be all about the stuff on the top of cakes was sadly unromantic! But, then, she did not believe it. She had found out long ago that servants scarcely ever understand things, and she still chose to imagine the citron-flower as larger, sweeter, whiter than any she had yet seen, and the land where it grew a Paradise of sunshine.

There was a concert to be given in aid of the hospital, and Luigia heard that the lady staying in her father's house was going to sing at it. One of the servants had a programme of the entertainment, and Luigia saw that, "Knowest thou the land," was put down against the name of the lady. From that moment she was wild to go. But, how to manage it? She dared not ask her father, and none of the

servants would take her. She worried herself over this problem day and night for half a week, and at last, on the day of the concert, carried out a bold resolve. She hung about the landing and staircase all the morning, hoping to meet the lady with the lovely voice.

At last she was rewarded by seeing her come upstairs, and alone. Luigia, hanging over the banisters and swinging her feet through the posts, waited till she was actually passing her, and then she turned suddenly.

"Please, won't you take me to the concert?" she said, looking up into her face wistfully.

"Why, my dear child, do you come to me about it?" said the lady, stopping in surprise. "Who are you?—Mr. Daubigny's little girl?"

"I am Luigia Daubigny. I want to go and hear you sing this evening—more than anything else. I will hide under the seat of the carriage if you will take me."

She did not speak passionately, but there was a restrained force in her voice that had its effect. The lady laughed a little, and looked at her intently. The pale, uplifted face, with its tremulous mouth and shadowy eyes, touched the vein of romance in her, and she said gently—

"Of course, you may come—at least, I suppose so. I will take you with me. But, why don't you go to your father about it, darling?"

To this she made no reply, but stood there in silence, rubbing her finger backwards and forwards along the rail of the banister with downcast eyes. The lady, half guessing something of the history of neglect, kissed her and went away, promising to take her in the evening if she could.

How it was all managed Luigia never knew, but a message came to the nurseries that she was to be dressed and sent downstairs. She drove to the town with her father and the lady and her husband, and sat in the first row of the seats at the concert. The lady was very kind to her, and when she went away to sing she whispered a few words to her husband, who, laughing, turned to Luigia and tried to amuse her by saying funny things. But Luigia thought

him very tiresome, and wanted only to sit still and listen. Presently the lady came forward, and stood in the front of the platform, with a diamond star in her hair, and some one began to play the accompaniment. Luigia looked around her at the audience with a proud consciousness of proprietorship in the lady and what was coming, but when it came she could think no more of the people. The beautiful, high notes rang out louder than ever, sometimes joyful, sometimes sad, and there was an indescribable pathos about it all that touched her to the quick. She wanted to cry, but pride forbade such an exhibition of feeling, and, after the song was over, her one longing was to go home and to bed, away from the eyes of all beholders.

The next morning the lady came into the nursery.

"I am going away to-day," she said, "but, if you like, you can come with me to the drawing-room now, and I will sing to you as long as you like, as you seem so fond of music."

Luigia went with her. She drew a chair up to her side, and sat there gravely listening for an hour or more, with her hands in her lap, her feet dangling, and her eyes fixed on the lady. The room echoed with beautiful, soft notes, and Luigia's mind went away on the wings of her fancy into far-off regions.

"What have you been thinking about all the time, you funny little girl?" said the lady, when she stopped.

But no words could tell that, and Luigia did not try. She only put her chair back and ran away, and the lady looked after her wonderingly.

Once she found, in one of the disused rooms, an old guitar. Its ribbons were faded, its strings were out of tune, but it was richly inlaid with ivory and silver, and deserved a better fate than that of being stowed away with useless and dilapidated furniture. She did not know that it had belonged to her mother, and that Daubigny had given it to her on the day that she had promised to be his wife, but she recognized it at once as the same that lay in the hands of the beautiful lady in the picture she had found in the garret. She touched the strings delicately with the tips of her fin-

gers, but could make very little of the sounds they uttered till she took it to the blind boy at the lodge, who had a fiddle. Between them they managed to get it into tune, and then Luigia learned to play on it after a fashion of her own.

One morning Daubigny, who was pacing the conservatory, cigarette in mouth, was arrested by sounds that had long been foreign to his ear. They came from the drawing-room; it was summer time, and the windows were thrown open. He went to one of them and peeped in. The sight that met his eyes was an odd one. The blind boy from the lodge had been decoyed by Luigia into his master's house, and stood near the open window, fiddle in hand, playing some air he had caught from a Savoyard beggar-boy and his concertina. By his side on the floor sat Luigia, accompanying him on the guitar, and singing softly in a childish, treble voice. The words were all make-believe—mere gibberish without meaning—but her power of imitation was so great that an involuntary smile stole over Daubigny's face as he listened. The next instant, however, it clouded and he turned away. He loved music, but there was something in the sound of that guitar that grated on his nerves. He began to pace restlessly up and down the conservatory, and ended by throwing himself on to one of the cane lounges as far from the little musicians as possible.

When the performance was over, Luigia led the blind boy carefully through the window, and along the conservatory towards the door into the garden. Daubigny was half hidden behind an orange tree, and she was unconscious of his presence until they reached it. She started as she came upon him, and the hand that held the blind boy's twitched convulsively. She came to a sudden standstill.

The boy's thin face flushed uneasily, and, aware that he was in the presence of a superior—probably the master of the house—he began to fumble with trembling fingers for the handle of the door.

Daubigny rose from the lounge, and, coming forward, laid his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

"Don't be afraid of me; you have done nothing wrong.

I will give you a better violin than that if you will come up and play to me sometimes. I am very fond of music, you know."

The boy's face flushed a still deeper scarlet, and his lips twitched nervously.

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind, but—but I don't play well enough to be listened to."

"Nonsense!" cried Daubigny, laughing reassuringly. "I am no great critic; you need not be afraid of me. Come up on Sunday—Sunday afternoon, and I'll give you a new violin, and you shall tell me how you like it."

The boy murmured his thanks again, and Daubigny, seeing that he was embarrassed almost beyond endurance, opened the door for him, and let him escape. When alone with Luigia, he turned to her with a very different look and tone. He pointed to the guitar she held.

"Where did you get that?"

"I found it," said Luigia, clutching it tightly, as the idea rose in her mind that it might be taken from her.

"Where?"

"In one of the rooms upstairs."

"Give it to me."

She held it out to him obediently.

"You must find something else to play on," he said, and he flung it behind him on to the lounge.

She turned slowly and walked away.

He watched her in silence, with a frown gathering on his brows. As she reached the further end of the conservatory, and a dozen yards of matting-covered pathway stretched between them, he called out—

"Luigia."

She turned and looked at him hesitatingly.

"Come here," he said.

She went back. He took up the guitar hurriedly, and held it out to her.

"Here, take it—do what you like with it—only never let me see it again."

She clasped it in her arms as though it were some living creature she believed she should never see again, and turned

away without a word. Daubigny meanwhile watched her narrowly. When she had gone, he threw himself back again on the lounge, muttering—

"She may as well have it. What is that senseless bit of wood to me? Why should I hate to see it touched or hear it played? I do not—I will not care. As for the child, she is part and parcel of it. They were both hers, and can only mean pain to me—more pain!"

He lifted his hand, absently plucking a flower from the orange plant, which grew so near where he was sitting that its blossoms almost touched his face. He snapped it from its stalk, and flung it away.

"But all that is past now," he muttered, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I care for nothing, and never will again. It is the only true wisdom." And he proceeded at his leisure to roll another cigarette.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY ADELAIDE.

A SHORT time after this little incident Luigia's ears caught the rumour of an event which was supposed by the household to be near at hand. It was discussed in her hearing with all the freedom for which servants are remarkable.

"I'll not put up with it!" cried Jane Sharpe, one of the housemaids, bursting into the nursery one afternoon to deliver herself of her wrath in Fanny's sympathetic hearing. "I'll give notice if it goes on like this. There she is again, a-sweepin' thro' the place as tho' it all belonged to her, and a-castin' her heyes into the corners on the look-out fer dust and cobwebs. I'll not stand much more of it. 'Aughty thing!"

"There now!" exclaimed Fanny, laying down her work to listen, "it's a clear proof how she'll carry on when she *is* mistress. I, for one, won't stop. The day she comes in, that day I go out, as sure as my name's Fanny Parsons."

Luigia was sitting reading in the window, but she laid down her book to listen. The maids scarcely lowered their voices in her presence, for their master's neglected child was no more to be feared than one of themselves.

One of the footmen passing the open door, and catching the drift of the conversation, came in to add the weight of his opinion to the matter in hand.

"There's no denying as she's a fine-lookin' woman," he observed, "one can see with half a eye as she's kerridge-born, and the way she holds her head is quite the lady."

"Ah, but then, you never see the first Mrs. Daubigny," said Jane Sharpe, lowering her voice with a glance at Luigia, "you wouldn't think nothink o' Lady Hadelaide if you had. Such elegant ways you never did see, and so easy and haffable in her speech as you'd think we was all ladies-born a-sittin' in our drawing-rooms. It's a sad pity she went as she did!"

"Ah," sighed Fanny, "and I always say as Miss Luigia'll go just the same"—Luigia dropped her eyes on to her book and pretended not to hear what was being said—"for she's got just the same way with her."

All three looked at Luigia with deep interest, and a moment's silence intervened. Then the housemaid remarked, in a significant undertone—

"He's not over set on her, to be sure, but he's as proud as lucifers—as proud as a whole box o' matches, if you come to that—and there's no sayin' what he'd do if it happened a second time. The missis sunk terrible deep, it did."

"Pr'aps the new missis'll make him forget the old one," suggested Mr. Price.

"Not she!" cried Fanny, "bein' a widder, and the other side o' thirty, and that cold she'd freeze a kitchen fire on a summer's day. You'd never see her eyes look as Miss Luigia's ma's used to look. My word! didn't they shine when she was dressed up for company!"

"No 'aughty Lady Hadelaides for me!" cried Jane, leaving the room with a bounce. "She can get her cobwebs swep' by someone else for all I'll be trodden underfoot and made a black slave of."

Luigia listened to this conversation, and many similar ones, with breathless interest. What did it mean? She knew he did not love her, but she was quite as jealous where he was concerned as if he did. She could not endure the idea of this marriage. She had often seen Lady Adelaide Carmichael driving through the town or calling at the house with her mother, but she had never taken any interest in her. The little girl, however, who rode the rough Shetland pony, and had such a bright, merry face, she had often envied. She had no pony of her own, and her riding consisted of a barebacked mount over a rough field when the groom was out exercising, or a few minutes astride her father's horse after it had been sent round to the stables.

She could not frame in words her horror of this rumoured marriage; she could not even understand why she so hated it, for she had nothing to lose and everything to gain by it. Yet it was a constant nightmare to her. At one moment she was on the point of imploring her father to give it up, but the next she shrank back, with an intense fear of a rebuff. When had he ever listened to her? What weight would her wishes have in the matter? She knew only that a frown was sure to cloud his face at sight of her, that he would dismiss her with a few brief, cold words, and that she should have to go away. There was nothing to be gained from her father, and her only hope lay in Lady Adelaide herself. So she formed some sort of childish plan, and awaited her opportunity.

It happened in the beginning of September that one afternoon Lady Adelaide, with her mother and little girl, drove over from Friarsgate to call. Five o'clock tea was served on the lawn, and Luigia, who, in company with her rag doll, was playing near, could watch the party through the trees without being seen. She seated herself on the low bough of a tree, and, with the doll lying neglected in her arms, fixed her eyes and thoughts on her father and his guests.

It was a very merry party apparently. There was a good deal of talking and laughing, and much of the general attention was centered on Lady Adelaide's little daughter, a

showy, handsome child of about thirteen. Daubigny was teasing her, stealing her peaches, waiting on her with exaggerated politeness. The girl seemed used to that sort of treatment, and coquetted with him as readily as if she had been a woman of the world. She was evidently clever and amusing, too, for her remarks were received with much laughter, and once Luigia saw Daubigny take her hand and kiss it with all the elaborate homage he might pay to royalty. The daughter of the house watched in silence the attentions and flatteries that were lavished on the little visitor, and a feeling of bitter jealousy rose in her heart. Even the dog was allowed to mingle with the party, and lie at Daubigny's feet, while she, his nearest possession, could only watch him from afar.

"There's your ma as is to be, Miss Luigia!" cried Fanny, who, with her work was seated on a bench beneath the tree. "Don't she look proud and pleased at the way your pa goes on with Miss Isabelle! He'll make a fine lot o' her when they comes to live here, I'll be bound!"

Luigia's eyes moved from her father to Lady Adelaide, who, leaning back beneath the shade of her parasol, watched the playful warfare between Daubigny and her child with an amused smile on her proud lips. But she said nothing, and the maid continued—

"Ain't she dressed fine, too! Look at her pretty white frock, and long feather! *You* ain't got a feather like that, for all your pa's so rich!"

Luigia was still silent.

"It's to be hoped as your new ma'll be kind to you," continued Fanny, taking up her work again with an indignant sniff, "tho' it's flyin' in the face o' nature to expect it. Stepmothers never is. There was a gell in our village as her stepmother beat her to death—not as her ladyship would do that—but it comes to much the same thing in the end."

She rose, folded her work, and went indoors, telling Luigia to follow in a few minutes for tea. But Luigia forgot her tea, and her doll lay forlornly on the ground. Her eyes were fixed on the group on the lawn, which was now breaking up. Daubigny, with the old lady on his arm, was

strolling off in the direction of the lake, and Lady Adelaide with her little girl followed slowly. Luigia kept them within sight, full of her project. Fortune favoured her, for on reaching the lake Lady Adelaide seated herself on a bench, while the child went down to the water's edge to feed the swans.

Luigia waited until Daubigny and old Lady Friarsgate had disappeared round a bend in the lake, and then she made her desperate venture. Clutching the ugly doll more tightly than before, she forced her way through the thick bushes behind the bench on which Lady Adelaide sat, and suddenly appeared before her with her petition.

"If you marry my father," she began abruptly, looking up into her face with great earnestness, "you can't think how unhappy it will make every one. The servants will all leave, and so will Mrs. Parsons the housekeeper, and it will be dreadful!"

Lady Adelaide's face was a cold and somewhat haughty one; she was a woman of the world, and it was probably years since she had blushed or looked confused. But she blushed now: a flood of crimson mounted to her temples, and to the very roots of her hair. She gazed at the little figure before her with unutterable surprise and disdain.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed.

"I am Luigia Daubigny."

Lady Adelaide probably knew of Luigia's existence, but she had utterly forgotten it, for she was seldom seen by any of Daubigny's guests. She could not have looked more aghast if a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet. She sat in silence, staring at her.

Luigia came a step nearer, and fixed her dark eyes, full of melancholy, on the stern face that looked down on her.

"You have Isabelle and other people. I have only father. If you marry him he will forget me still more."

The pathos of this appeal might have touched Lady Adelaide if her mind had been free to receive impressions, but it was filled with one absorbing thought—that her private affairs had been made public property and gossiped

over. The rumour might even have reached Daubigny's ears, and at the thought her face took a still deeper hue of shame. She rose to her feet, and confronted Luigia with extreme hauteur.

"Who put this idea into your head?"

"I think it was Jane, one of the housemaids, or it *might* have been Price. But afterwards they all said the same, and they won't any of them stay. They've quite made up their minds."

Lady Adelaide looked down on her, and said with a curl of her lip—

"I suppose you do not mean to be impertinent, but you can tell your friends the servants when next they mention the subject, that Lady Adelaide Carmichael has no intention whatever of marrying their master."

She turned on her heel to walk off, and, as she did so, came face to face with Daubigny and her mother, who could not have failed to hear the last words she uttered. Indeed, one glance at his face was sufficient to show that he grasped the whole situation. A flush of deeper embarrassment than any that had coloured Lady Adelaide's cheek rushed into his own, and, out of consideration for her, he bent his eyes upon the ground. He was utterly confused and ashamed, and stood silent in the presence of the woman who had refused him before he had asked her to be his wife. An awkward silence ensued.

Luigia, the culprit, stood in their midst in her faded cotton frock, with her long black hair hanging loosely round her. She was ignorant of how she had offended, yet aware that she was in dire disgrace. She saw and felt at once that her father was angry with her. She saw also that he held in his hand the hand of the beautifully dressed little girl, who was caressed and well beloved, while she, his own daughter, stood apart, cared for by none.

The awkward silence lasted only one moment, for old Lady Friarsgate came to the rescue, and lifting her gold-headed stick towards the distant woods, remarked upon the exquisite beauty of the autumn tints and the wonderful mildness of the weather. Lady Adelaide regained her

presence of mind immediately, and spoke and moved with composure.

They all walked back towards the house, Daubigny, almost in silence, at Lady Adelaide's side. But he was not thinking of Lady Adelaide, or of the embarrassing position in which they had both been placed; he was thinking of a beautiful, brilliant face that had vanished for ever from his sight, of soft lips that had once been pressed to his, of a sweet voice that still echoed in his ears. He turned to look back at the child of the woman who had ruined his life, but whose memory was still so passionately loved in the secret depths of his heart. She stood there alone, in disgrace, gazing after them. He had half a mind to turn back and speak to her—but then, he had nothing to say! To tell the truth, he was both shy of and afraid of her.

He walked back to the house beside Lady Adelaide, but little Belle's hand was no longer in his. His conversation with her mother was both formal and forced, and she believed him to be still embarrassed by what had occurred. In reality, he was living far more in the past than in the present.

As the carriage containing Lady Adelaide and her mother and child drove away, he turned back to the house with a sense of relief.

"Have I really been mad enough to think of such a thing! Should I be satisfied to have that woman where *she* used to be?—a block of ice to warm me where I once had living fire?" He smiled scornfully; then, in a moment, changed his tone. "Fire! Yes, but fire is dangerous! I will never meddle with it again. Lady Adelaide would not make havoc of a man's heart. I'll try my luck with her yet—in spite of this idiotic affair to-day!"

But in two days' time news came to the Hall that Lady Adelaide and Miss Isabella had gone to Paris on a visit, and that they meant to spend the winter abroad. There was rejoicing throughout the household, but none guessed it was to Luigia they owed this happy escape from a threatened calamity.

CHAPTER V.

THE ITALIAN SINGING-MASTER.

Lady Adelaide lived abroad for several years, and by degrees all dread of a second marriage passed out of Luigia's mind. She grew from childhood into girlhood apparently without Daubigny being aware of the fact, and they lived as far apart as ever. This was not by design, but from force of habit. He neglected her entirely, and allowed her to live her own life without interference. When her Aunt Grace paid her flying visits to the Hall, she tried to remedy matters as far as possible, but her innovations were never long-lived. Arrangements were made for Luigia to share lessons with the children at the vicarage, but when winter came, and she had a cold, she stayed at home for several weeks, and the custom was never resumed. Another time an elderly governess was procured for her, who spent her day in crocheting counterpanes for some charitable institution, while her charge ran almost as wild as before. When Aunt Grace married and went to India there was no one left in existence who concerned themselves the very least in the matter.

By the time she reached the age of fifteen or sixteen, she began to feel her ignorance acutely, and, far too proud to ask her father to trouble himself about her in any way, she set herself to learn what she could unaided. She taught herself, in spite of Miss Green's incompetency, and studied hard to make up for lost time. It was no good going to her governess for help; Miss Green was one of the good, old-fashioned school, who wrote a lady-like, "running" hand, sketched unnaturally from Nature, played spasmodically on the piano, and insisted upon an upright deportment, a mildness of speech, a neat arrangement of the hair, an absence of ideas, and all other essentials in a young lady's education. But she was no use for real study, and Luigia pored over her books alone.

She had grown into a tall girl, with a pale, dusky skin and black hair. She was not beautiful like her mother;

she was not even pretty, for she had a wide mouth and a childish, undeveloped figure. But she still had her beautiful eyes. Daubigny never could bear to look at them, since they reminded him of her mother's. If he met her accidentally, and she looked at him in her direct and fearless way, he experienced an uncomfortable feeling, as though he had done her some sort of injury, and she held herself aloof from him. This was perhaps the case. A new feeling had entered into her love for him; she was no longer afraid of him, and she could have stood his coldest word and sternest frown without flinching, for she had hardened her heart, and excessive pride had taught her self-control.

Although she would have gone without the bare necessities of life rather than have begged them from him, there was one matter in which her desire overcame her pride, and this was her education in music. For years she pinched and saved the chance trifles of money that fell into her hands with the idea of paying a master to teach her, but it was very little, after all, and at last she went to Miss Green about it. The governess had an interview with Daubigny, in which she represented that Miss Daubigny was rapidly reaching an age when it would be desirable for her to receive instruction in the fine arts, and that if she might venture to suggest a few lessons in music and painting from eminent masters——

Daubigny cut her short, laid a banknote on the table, begged her to make all necessary arrangements, and to come to him when she needed more money. There it ended, and he never inquired how she carried out her instructions.

But Luigia was happy. She went down once a week to Miss Baldwin's famous school in the town, and received piano and singing lessons from the master, who came from London to instruct her pupils. Miss Baldwin was, of course, greatly flattered at having the young lady from the Hall, and imagined that Mr. Daubigny must have been struck by the elegant playing of her young ladies at the Town Hall concert in aid of foreign missions. Her manner to Luigia was always one of deep respect.

The singing-master was a strange, impetuous little Italian, who was filled with the soul of music, and a passionate love of his art. He had once possessed a tenor voice, from which he had hoped great things, but asthma had seized him as its victim, and the voice had disappeared. He had then been obliged to exchange the rôle of performer for that of teacher, for he was very poor. His days were spent in trying to dun into commonplace pupils some faint knowledge of the divine art, which it is impossible to either learn or impart. He was often driven nearly mad, and the young ladies of Crawford House considered him vastly wanting in manners when he flung their music to the other end of the room, and declared it was useless wasting further time and money on them.

Luigia came to him as an oasis in the desert. She was a treat to which he looked forward the whole week. He had no other pupil so industrious, so promising. Besides her natural love for, and sympathy with, music, she had a perfect ear, a beautiful voice, and an amount of dramatic talent rarely found in a nature that is entirely English.

"You were born for the stage—you should sing in the opera!" he would cry. "You have the fire—the soul—the spirit of it! You would make your name!"

She only laughed at the time, but she kept his words in mind, and practised, if possible, more diligently than before. She was entirely satisfactory to the Signor, who delighted in seeing genius developing under his eye and in moulding it according to his ideas. She was after his own heart. So it came to pass that he often sent her tickets for concerts and special performances in London, which she could not, of course, attend. He knew nothing of her condition in life, whether she were rich or poor—only that she was capable of great things in the art to which he could never be anything but a humble servant.

The lessons went on regularly for a year. Wet or fine, Luigia, accompanied by Fanny, never failed to appear at the appointed hour on Wednesday afternoons. She had made great progress, and the Signor was indignant that so much talent should be wasted in a private career. He

spoke to Miss Baldwin on the subject one Wednesday afternoon, just before the hour for Luigia's lesson.

"Miss Daubigny has genius. She ought to make a name. She has a wonderful voice and emotional capacity. It is a thousand pities they should be wasted. Can she not study for a professional career?"

"Oh dear no!" cried Miss Baldwin aghast. "She is a young lady of very good family. Her father is a rich man, and she is his only daughter. She lives at the Hall—that great place with the park and iron gates. Oh dear no! I should think not, indeed!"

"It is a sad pity!" he ejaculated. "Many and many a name is made with far less talent. If only she were poor!"

At that moment Luigia entered the room somewhat hurriedly, with her music in her hand. Her face was flushed —perhaps from the quickness of her walk in the hot sun. She went to the window, and stood there until Miss Baldwin, after a few more words on indifferent subjects, had left the room. Then she went at once to the piano, and, without a word, began the exercise he set her.

It was recitative; a most difficult passage—a passage in which every other pupil of his had invariably failed. She sang it faultlessly. The Signor was in raptures. He turned from one to another of the exercises with eager hands, and she sang whatever he demanded of her without hesitation or a single fault. There was in her voice that day an additional force and power which her master felt as well as heard.

At the end of the lesson he turned to her, unable to entirely suppress his delight.

"You have done well to-day—better than usual."

"Yes," said Luigia, "I intended to do so."

There was something in her manner that made him twist round on the music stool and face her critically. She was standing behind him, her usually pale face flushed, and her eyes filled with suppressed excitement.

"It is a sinful waste of a fine talent!" said the little music-master impetuously. "You should enter the profession and make a name."

"Will you help me to do it?" she said.

"What!" cried the little man, staring at her as though he felt he had not heard aright.

"I want to go on the stage," she said deliberately. "I think I could sing—I think I could act. My mother's father did both in the Italian opera, you know."

"Indeed! I did not know. Ah! that accounts! But I am delighted to hear this. I feared that your family—your guardians—would dislike the idea."

"I shall not ask leave. My father would not give it if I did, I dare say. But it is nothing to him, and everything to me."

The Signor looked at her doubtfully. She was very young to speak so decidedly about her affairs, but, with her genius for music, she was mistress of the world.

"You intend to leave your home, mademoiselle?" he said, slowly—"and for the stage?"

"If I only could. Anyway, I can run away, I suppose."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you are too young, too inexperienced. How can you go out alone into the world to fight your way?"

"It can be done, I suppose. I am not afraid. Anything is better than living at home." She flung back her head, and her eyes flashed. "My father is going to be married again in three months' time. I have only just heard."

"Ah, so that is it!" exclaimed the music-master, jumping off the stool with excitement. "Oh, if you but go on the stage, believe me, your fortune is made, and your name is in every mouth. I speak with certainty."

"What do you think of my voice?"

"Your voice is divine, mademoiselle."

"And how long a training should I require?"

He looked her over from head to foot.

"May I take the liberty of enquiring mademoiselle's age?"

"Seventeen."

"That is young, but it is better to begin young. You will need years of study before you can come out. You must not strain your voice by singing in public too early."

"That training is the drawback. I have no money of my own, and do not know how to pay for it."

"Have you no one who would help you?"

"No one."

A little silence fell, during which the Signor lost himself in thought. He was brought to his senses by hearing a clock strike six—half an hour after the usual time for the lesson to be ended, and, starting up in sudden consternation, he took his leave.

The following Wednesday he awaited the hour for Luigia's lesson with both dread and impatience. He had decided to take an important step, the wisdom of which he could not help doubting. But he felt he must make the plunge, whatever the result might be. He was alternately lavish of his praise, and irritably critical throughout the lesson, but Luigia bore his changes of mood with a quiet dignity that made him even more nervous. He was glad when the lesson was over, and he was at liberty to speak what was on his mind.

"Have you decided for the opera, mademoiselle?" he began abruptly.

"I have thought about it a great deal," she answered, "but I do not see how to manage it. What do you suggest?"

"Have you really made up your mind?"

"Quite."

"Then listen to me," cried the little man, suddenly jumping up, and speaking excitedly. "You will think what I am going to say very strange, but you must give it consideration. There is one way in which this thing can be done."

"What is it?" she asked, with a sudden light flashing into her eyes.

"You must marry me. As my wife it would be easy."

Her lips parted with something like a gasp, but she spoke steadily enough.

"Tell me how."

The Signor leaned heavily on the keys of the piano,

eliciting from them a heavy muffled clang, which, however, neither of them heard. He spoke rapidly.

"I am an elderly man, a bachelor and poor. But my name is well known, and I am acquainted, more or less, with all the greatest singers and musicians of the day. Any *protégée* of mine could be introduced into their world with the greatest ease, and she could get a thorough training for nothing, or next to nothing. You wish to enter that circle, and have that training—it is your natural atmosphere. As my wife it would be easy."

She turned away to the window with a dramatic little gesture expressive of suppressed excitement, but she did not speak, and he went on.

"It is true that I am old and you are young, but that is the case in many marriages. I hear that you are rich, and I—I am poor. But what of that? Youth and wealth are nothing to those who have art. Art is everything. I do not want your money; I would not accept it if it were flung at my feet, but I *do* want you. Think well, mademoiselle, before you throw away the offer of what I can give you—better, perhaps, than any one you are ever likely to meet."

He spoke vehemently, bent upon carrying all before him, and she looked at him fully, steadily, calmly. Could she do this thing? Was it possible to marry the man before her? She would do a great deal for her art, but would she do that? For an instant the doubt lay in her; then she threw it away. This little man, with his odd, wrinkled, yellow face, his thin hair, his ugly hands, and funny clothes! No, the thing was impossible!

"We do not love each other," she said slowly.

"No, but, believe me, love would come in time," he cried, eagerly advancing a few steps towards the window where she still stood, with her back turned to him again. "Besides, I should be content with a quiet affection, and a wife who cared for the things I cared for. My joy would be in watching your genius develop, and in clearing your path before you. I am past the age, perhaps, for any very romantic feelings."

"*But, I am not!*" she cried, turning to him with such a sudden flash in her beautiful eyes that he began to doubt if he were really as secure as he imagined. "Your offer is very tempting, but I do not think I will accept it."

The Signor caught her hand in his.

"Consider again before you refuse. It is your best—your only chance."

"I know, but I dare not take it."

He looked at her in silence for a moment, then, as she turned her eyes on him in mute appeal against the manner in which he was still holding her hand, he dropped it.

"I dare say you are right. Heaven knows I have made many mistakes in my life, and this might have been my greatest. It is, perhaps, too great a risk to join together the old and the young."

"Yes," said Luigia, looking at him fully and reflectively with great calm eyes.

"It is better so—it is better so," he said, turning towards the door. "And yet—and yet I would have risked it. If ever you change your mind, mademoiselle, do not be afraid to let me know."

"Thank you," said Luigia.

He made her a profound bow, and left the room. He was not broken-hearted, but he felt more lonely and disappointed than he had done for years. The vision of a young wife at his fireside had haunted him for a whole week, and it was hard to give it up.

"She would have been a great pleasure to me," he murmured to himself on his homeward journey, "and I should not have been afraid to trust her. She has a very quiet manner, and a straightforward way of saying exactly what she means. She is not of the giddy kind. And then her voice——!"

And Luigia, how did she spend the hour after receiving this, her first offer of marriage?

The hot June day had ended in a thunderstorm, and Fanny was late in coming to fetch her. She waited in the deserted schoolroom, and sat down on the window-seat, where many a girl had scratched her name in ink or cut it

with a penknife on the wood. Her hands were folded in her lap, her eyes fixed absently on the laurels outside, from which the heavy rain was washing the dust of weeks.

"I suppose *he* would have been glad to be rid of me," she was thinking. "I have made a mistake—I ought to have said yes."

She walked home through the rain without waiting for Fanny, who had no intention of fetching her young mistress in a thunderstorm, and was much more agreeably engaged in stopping up her ears behind the kitchen door while Daubigny's French valet protected her from the lightning with his person.

In passing through the hall, wet and draggled, Luigia heard the unusual clatter of teacups in the drawing-room, and through the half-open door she caught a glimpse of Lady Adelaide and Lady Friarsgate seated there, with Daubigny in attendance. A pile of wraps, silk cloaks, and umbrellas lay on the hall table, with their cards, and a little toy terrier ran out into the hall and snapped at her skirts as she passed.

She went upstairs and locked herself in her room violently. Her black brows were drawn together in a frown.

"I will say 'yes' next time, whoever it may be—yes, whoever it may be! even if it is a little queer man ten times queerer and older and uglier than the Signor! I will not live here another moment if ever I am offered a loophole of escape." And she stamped her foot passionately.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SQUIRE OF RODNEY.

It was quite true that Luigia's father and Lady Adelaide were to be married very shortly.

Rumour, which is generally so far in advance of fact, had, in this instance, been wonderfully slow, and not a hint

had been dropped before the news burst like a thunderclap on the unsuspecting world. It was not contradicted, and the lady and gentleman chiefly concerned received the congratulations that poured in upon them without evincing either surprise or annoyance. It was an undisputed fact, and preparations for the wedding were carried on with great rapidity.

The happy pair were to be married from Friarsgate, which was about ten miles distant from the Hall. A formal invitation to the wedding was sent to Luigia, but she declined it, and preferred to spend the week in which the ceremony took place with her governess, Miss Green, in her little home at Ely. She gave this visit as a reason for her refusal, and held herself aloof from everything in connection with the marriage.

Her father, during the few remaining weeks before his marriage, filled the house with a shooting-party. Among the guests Luigia recognised the elderly gentleman who had been with her father years ago when she offered him the flowers on the staircase. She found out that he was the squire of a parish in Deneshire, and that his name was Rodney. He was also reported to be immensely rich, and to have, besides the property which he inherited from his ancestors, a million or more of money which he had dug up for himself in his youth out of the Australian gold mines.

He had not forgotten Luigia, it seemed, for on meeting her in the gardens one morning, as he was taking his constitutional, he accosted her at once as the "flower-maiden," and declared he had been looking for her everywhere. The others had gone off shooting, and he was left to entertain himself. He told her he was very fond of flowers, and a great gardener at home, and he made her pilot him through the greenhouses, and point out her favourite plants. This she was nothing loth to do. Flowers were her friends and she knew their habits far better than she knew the ways of the world. If he had asked her where Timbuctoo was situated, or which of our kings was beheaded, she might not have been able to answer him, but her lonely life had led her to find occupations for herself, and practical ex-

perience in the tending of favourite plants had taught her far more than any lectures on botany would have done. The old squire, as he was generally called, was delighted with her and her gentle ministrations, and followed her about the whole morning, snipping, cutting, watering, with a patience that knew no flagging.

Another morning, when he came upon her sitting on a bench in the shade of the syringa bushes, with an open book on her knees and a frown of severe application puckering her brows, he was just as determined to ascertain her taste in literature as he had been to probe the depths of her botanical knowledge.

"What frantic novel is this I have caught you reading?" he cried, coming suddenly upon her from behind, and putting his hand on the open page, so that she could not withdraw the book. "Something most absorbing, I should say, from your face. Is it suicide or murder, or a love-tale gone wrong?"

She looked up into the quizzical face of the old gentleman, and dismissed her frown.

"It is 'Greene's English History.'"

"English History? Nonsense! I know better! You are trying to deceive me, and it is really some tremendous novel in disguise," he said, still keeping prisoner the book and the hand that held it, and looking down intently into the clear depths of the eyes that were so innocently put at his disposal.

"No," said Luigia, gravely, "it is really and truly 'Greene's English History.' I am studying by myself. I am very ignorant, you know. Other girls know twice as much as I do."

"I like ignorance," said the old gentleman, flatly. "It is a good, old-fashioned quality that we rarely see now. Every one is so tremendously clever nowadays. The more ignorant you are, the better I shall like you, my dear."

"Then you ought to like me very much indeed," laughing a little.

"Perhaps I do, but it wouldn't do to tell you so."

"Why not?"

"Because," scrutinizing her closely with his keen blue eyes, "you would think I was in my second childhood, or had suddenly lost my senses. I leave it to the young men to tell you how much they like you."

She picked a syringa leaf to use as a bookmarker, and closed her history on it.

"I am going in to practice," she said, and she walked off without further delay.

She was not elegantly dressed, but the old gentleman watched her with a smile of admiration as well as amusement lingering round his lips. She wore a loose holland apron, or pinafore, reaching nearly to the hem of her skirt —a garment calculated to utterly obscure any grace she might chance to possess—and low on her brows lay a flat, wide-brimmed, straw hat, without a vestige of trimming. Evidently she dressed more with a view to use than to beauty; but, for some odd reason of his own, old Squire Rodney chose to admire her, and after she had disappeared round the last of the syringa bushes, he sat himself down on the bench she had quitted, and thought about her for fully an hour.

He was himself by no means a romantic-looking figure. He was short and broad, and inclined to be stout; his thick, crisp hair was iron-grey, his mouth and chin clean shaven, and his features ruddy and irregular. But their irregularity was redeemed by an expression of shrewdness and good nature, the absence of which makes many a handsomer face less pleasing.

The next morning he came upon her again as she was gardening in the hot sun.

"You ran away from me so hurriedly yesterday that I had no time to ask a favour of you which I came expressly to ask. What frightened you away?"

"I was not frightened," she said, stopping, rake in hand, and lifting her eyes.

"Was it press of business, then?"

"I did not run away from you," she said calmly. "Why should I?"

Squire Rodney smiled. The tables had been skilfully turned on him, and he did not know how to answer her.

"Well, we will dismiss the subject, and go back to the favour I have to ask. I want you to sing to me."

She threw down her rake at once, drew off her gardening gloves, and led the way into the house without any of the usual excuses young ladies are so fond of making.

The drawing-room was in twilight from the shade of the striped linen blinds that shaded the conservatory windows, and felt cool and secluded after the glare of the August sunshine outside.

She seated herself at the piano and struck the keys softly with her dusky fingers. Before beginning she looked up for a moment under the shade of her hat.

"How did you know I could sing? I never told you."

"No," replied the old gentleman, drawing a chair up to her side and preparing to listen intently, "no one told me you could sing, but—I saw it in your eyes."

There was some expression so apparent in his own that she dropped hers. She began to sing, and sang as long as he cared to listen, which was till the luncheon-gong sounded at one o'clock.

Luigia lived entirely in her own rooms. Daubigny breakfasted, lunched, and dined alone unless there were visitors. He rarely met his daughter, and then, more often than not, by chance. Sometimes he forced himself to speak to her, but it would never be more than a few words. They had grown into this habit through long years, and, unnatural as it may seem, it was more natural to them than a less distant intercourse would have been. If either had made an attempt at anything warmer it would have been chilled by the other, partly through pride, partly through embarrassment. Father and daughter were hopelessly estranged, and this second marriage could place them no further apart than they were already. Luigia knew this, and yet she resented that marriage as vehemently as she had done in her childhood six years before.

She heard from her maid Fanny, when she returned from her little visit to Ely, that the wedding had been a

comparatively quiet one. Miss Carmichael had been much admired, and those of Daubigny's servants who had gone over to Friarsgate declared that she was a great beauty. The bride and bridegroom went to Switzerland for their honeymoon, and returned through Paris. There, at the end of a fortnight, Miss Carmichael was to join them.

Towards the middle of September old Mr. Rodney happened to be in Paris on business, and he saw a good deal of the Daubignys. Lady Adelaide's daughter was also of the party, and a mild flirtation sprang up between her and the Squire. He paid her a great deal of flattering attention, took endless trouble to secure her good seats at the opera, was indefatigable in escorting her sight-seeing, and altogether proved himself a devoted admirer. Miss Carmichael was gracious enough to accept his homage and to openly acknowledge him, old gentleman as he was, in her train of devotees.

Rumours spread abroad, and even reached as far as England, that the Squire's wary heart, which had withstood the fire of lovely eyes for nearly sixty years, had at last surrendered to the charms of a pair that were as bright as they were blue, and Rodney Manor began to expect shortly the arrival of a young mistress to rule over its bachelor hearth.

A few days before the return of the party to England, Mr. Rodney called on the Daubignys to pay his adieux.

The ladies were out shopping, and Daubigny, cigarette in mouth, was consoling himself in their absence by leaning over the balcony and looking into the busy street below.

"I called to say good-bye," said Squire Rodney, "and am sorry to find the ladies out. I cross to Dover to-day and shall be at Rodney to-morrow for the tenants' ball. I could not well miss that without hurting their feelings."

"Bad policy to hurt their feelings," drawled Daubigny, lazily. "How awfully hot it always is in Paris! A fellow can scarcely take the trouble to exist in such weather as this. They wanted me to go shopping with them, but I exerted myself sufficiently to escape, though Heaven alone

knows how! for when Belle Carmichael wishes a thing she generally manages to get it."

"You are an immense favourite in that quarter."

"I dare say. I buy her everything she condescends to want, which is, I believe, a sure, though somewhat expensive, road to a lady's heart."

"What a cynical fellow you are! Why, I am pretty nearly double your age, and I declare I'm as fresh as ever. I think better of women than to believe they are won in such ways."

"You have not had much practical experience of them, perhaps. Turnips and hay are more in your line down at Rodney, I should imagine. But, by the way, when are you coming to us for the pheasants? We shall be home at the end of next week."

"Thanks. But I'm not sure I shall come at all, after all. There is business—engagements—all sorts of things to prevent."

"Indeed! And what do you mean by that?"

Daubigny turned his eyes on to his companion with a more wide-awake scrutiny than he had appeared capable of a minute ago.

"Why, to tell the truth"—with a shamefaced smile—"your daughter has been pretty near making a fool of me!"

"Has she?"—elevating his eyebrows, and smiling carelessly. "It is a way she has, though I should have thought that you were pretty safe."

"Not in the least," replied the old gentleman. "Never felt more insecure in my life. Hadn't the least notion what I should say or do next."

"Really?" said Daubigny, fairly laughing. "Well, every man to his taste; she is a lively, handsome girl, and I suppose——"

"Good heavens! I don't mean that one!" broke in the Squire emphatically. "I mean the other—the one with the eyes and the voice!"

"Luigia?" ejaculated Daubigny, staring into his friend's face with suddenly arrested attention. "That child? You can't mean *her*?"

"I do indeed, child as she is, and in spite of her outlandish, foreign-sounding name. By the way, how did she come by it?"

"How should I know?" replied Daubigny shortly.

The squire took no notice of this sudden change of manner, and continued in a highly delighted tone of voice: "She very nearly made a fool of me, and that's the truth! I fell in love with her years ago as a child, you remember."

"She is a child still," muttered Daubigny, in a low voice. "I never heard of anything more ridiculous—more absurd!"

"Absurd? Not at all. My dear fellow, you cannot have looked at her, or else you have not the good taste with which I have always credited you. She is not nearly as handsome as Miss Carmichael, I own; in fact, I don't believe she has a single good feature in her face beyond her eyes. But they are enough in themselves! Then her voice—both in speaking and singing—is the very sweetest I ever heard, and the way she moves—why, it's a treat to watch her. She has the makings of a dangerously fascinating woman about her if you give her time to develop."

"Don't speak to me of fascination!" cried Daubigny fiercely. "It's a woman's curse. Let her be dull, plain, stupid—anything but fascinating. I hate the very sound of the word!"

"That cannot alter the fact. I tell you she has very nearly turned my head—a catastrophe I never had any serious fear of before—and she is seventeen and I am sixty. It may be ridiculous and absurd, but it is true. You will have to look after her, for if she can vanquish an old veteran like me, you may be sure those who are fresh to the fray will drop down quicker still."

"I do not choose to hear my daughter discussed—even by you," said Daubigny, haughtily, with such a flash of fire in his eyes that the poor squire apologized before he knew what he was about.

"I beg your pardon. It was very rude of me, but I spoke of her as a child, and I look on her in that light. If she wore elegant dresses, instead of a child's pinafore, and a

bonnet instead of a garden-hat without a ribbon in it, I might not have dared to do more than mention her name. But, for all that, I could not have respected her more truly than I do now."

Daubigny turned his back on his companion, merely accepting his apology by a slight inclination of the head, and showing by his whole manner that he did not wish to continue the subject. The good-natured squire, not at all hurt by his moodiness, turned the conversation into another channel, and after a few minutes took his leave. But before he went Daubigny, repentant, held out his hand.

"I have a horrible habit of being disagreeable without rhyme or reason," he said, half laughing, half serious. "It is the family temper, I suppose, which has always been considered a remarkably fine one. Please think no more about it; and, to show that you don't, will you meet us in London at the 'Burlington' on Friday, and go down home with us? I shall consider it a favour if you will."

"Of course I will," cried the squire, wringing his hand energetically. "My dear boy, I've been exposed to your squally weather too often for it to upset me. I know it blows over with the next wind."

And, laughing, they shook hands again and parted.

CHAPTER VII.

LUIGIA'S DÉBUT.

LUIGIA was sitting alone in her room in the twilight. It was a warm October evening, the evening of the day on which her father and stepmother had returned from their bridal tour, and the household was in a state of excitement such as it had not known since the dreadful day of the first Mrs. Daubigny's flight.

Luigia alone appeared undisturbed. She had not gone to dine with the travellers, who had only arrived in time for

seven o'clock dinner, but had received a message from Lady Adelaide that she would be glad to see Miss Daubigny in the drawing-room afterwards. She heard that Miss Carmichael, Squire Rodney, and Lord Bertram, who had ridden over from Friarsgate that afternoon, were also of the party; she would, therefore, have quite a formidable *début* to make, in facing so many people who were almost strangers to her.

She sat in her own room now, with her hands idle in her lap, and nothing more absorbing to occupy her attention than the twittering of the sleepy birds in the ivy outside the window.

There came a tap at the door, and Fanny entered.

"If you please, Miss Luigia, her ladyship wishes me to say as they have finished dinner, and are in the drawing-room, and will you please to go down."

"Very well," said Luigia.

She rose as the maid went out, and, leaning her elbows on the window-ledge, looked down on the terrace below. Through the gloom she could just distinguish the figures of two men pacing up and down, smoking as they talked. One was her father, and the other she did not know. She could hear their voices, and see their faces every now and then as they passed the flood of light that streamed through the open windows of the dining-room. She waited until the fragments of cigarette had been thrown away as the figures disappeared; then she went down.

She was ready, perfectly ready. She had expected the summons, and had dressed fully two hours before it was likely to come. Every detail of her appearance had been carefully attended to. There was not a hair among the soft, dark coils crowning her head that did not lie smoothly in its place; there was not a fold in her dress that had not been studied and arranged, yet the result was one of extreme simplicity. The dress itself was of an inexpensive material, but it fell in flowing, graceful folds, and she wore it with an air of dignity. For two whole months she had been preparing herself for this moment, and now that it had come, she was neither discomposed nor anxious.

The drawing-room was in darkness when she entered it;

the windows leading into the conservatory were thrown wide open, and a sweet scent of flowers filled the air. She could hardly distinguish the different figures, but she noticed at once that her father and Miss Carmichael were standing at one of the windows in conversation. She stood for a moment on the threshold of the doorway, and looked around her. All eyes turned to the white figure that had appeared suddenly and quietly in their midst, and for a second or two no one seemed to recognize her. It was not till Mr. Rodney came forward and took her hands that Lady Adelaide rose from her chair to greet her.

"Why, here is my flower-maiden at last!" cried the squire, in his kind, hearty way. "I have been wondering whether she would condescend to honour us at all this evening, but I am glad to see she has some consideration for our feelings. Why didn't you come before?"

She turned from him without answering, but allowed her hand to remain in his while she gave the other to Lady Adelaide, who had come forward at last.

Lady Adelaide was surprised. Daubigny, when he had mentioned his daughter at all, had spoken of her as a mere child, and, during the three months of her engagement to him, she had only once paid a hasty visit to the Hall. The last time she had seen Luigia was as a child of ten years old on the memorable day of her embarrassing interview with her, and she had never realized how many years had passed between now and then. Indeed, Daubigny's daughter entered so little into his calculations that it was not wonderful that other people, less closely connected with her, should come to regard her existence as a mere nonentity. She had expected to see a lanky, awkward schoolgirl, who would come into the room shyly, and blush and stammer when spoken to. She had intended to greet her kindly, perhaps to kiss her, and lead her to a seat beside her own, where she would be sheltered from observation, and able to hide her embarrassment till she grew more used to her surroundings. But, instead, she found herself confronted by a step-daughter who came into the room with the quiet dignity of one who felt herself a daughter of the house, and had the manner of

receiving guests rather than of being received. She could see her large dark eyes shining calmly through the darkness, and she took the hand held out to her, hesitatingly.

"How do you do, Luigia," she said, almost awkwardly. "I hope you are quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you," and Luigia withdrew her hand.

"You do not know my daughter, I believe? Let me introduce her," said Lady Adelaide, regaining her usual manner, and moving across the room to the window where Daubigny and Miss Carmichael were standing.

Luigia followed her, and the introduction took place in due form.

She could see very little of this new sister of hers beyond a tall, elegant figure framed in the open window. She was far more conscious of a dark form beside her, which neither moved nor spoke, though it could not fail to see her.

"How do you do, papa?" said Luigia, coldly, going up to him, and an apology for a kiss passed between them.

She turned away, and seated herself in a low chair near the window at which Miss Carmichael was standing.

"I have been persuading your father to let us have a gondola, such as they use in Venice," said Miss Carmichael, turning to her with the instinct of politeness. "We could use it on the lake here, and it would look so picturesque and romantic, wouldn't it?"

"I have never seen one," said Luigia.

"Haven't you?"—in surprise. "Oh, well, you will see one now, for I am going to have one of my own. It is a pity the year is so far advanced, or we might have had such delightful water pic-nics. But I suppose we must try and wait till next summer. I mean to learn the guitar; it sounds so perfectly enchanting on the water in the evenings."

"Are you fond of music?"

"Oh, I adore it. I am simply lost without it. It is quite a passion with me, you know. Wherever we go the very first question I put is, 'What music is to be had?' People are beginning to understand that I can't live without it."

"Do you sing as well as play?"

"Oh, yes. I am always at the piano, morning, noon, and night. Mama and I have been travelling about constantly for the last six years, and whenever we went to a place where there wasn't a piano, I wouldn't stay. It might be the loveliest scenery in the world, but it couldn't make up to me for the absence of a piano. You have no idea what a passion music is with musical people! Do you play or sing at all?"

"A little."

"I'm so glad. We must get up some duets together. I am longing to try your piano. My own is coming from Friarsgate to-morrow, and my fingers quite itch to touch it again."

The conversation was here interrupted by Lady Adelaide's clear tones.

"Belle, my dear, when are you going to give us some music? Mr. Rodney is getting quite impatient."

"What shall I sing? I am quite willing to oblige with anything from an anthem to the last French opera."

"Sing your pretty new song—the one we all liked so much."

Miss Carmichael turned to Luigia with a comical expression of dismay. "How am I to know which she means when I have at least half a dozen new songs every week? Ah, here comes my cousin Frank. He must be introduced to you, and make himself agreeable while I go and hunt up a song."

A tall figure lounged in from the conservatory and bowed to Luigia. It dropped into the seat vacated by Miss Carmichael, and remarked upon the unusual mildness of the weather. Luigia did not deny the assertion, and silence fell between them.

Miss Carmichael had gone to the piano, and was turning over her music. Luigia could see her plainly now, in the light of the wax candles which stood on the piano, though the rest of the room was still in darkness, and she took in every detail of her appearance from head to foot with a critical eye.

Isabelle Carmichael was two or three years older than Luigia, and had the manners and appearance of a young lady who had been much in society, and was thoroughly confident of herself. She was a handsome girl, tall and well developed. She wore a pale blue gauze dress, fashionably made by an expensive Parisian authority; her hair was of the palest flaxen, and piled high upon her head, her eyes were large and blue, her nose aquiline, her mouth small, her skin delicately fair. She had a lively vivacious manner, and a tendency to smile and show her teeth on all possible occasions. Luigia did not admire her on the whole —but then, she was not an unprejudiced observer.

Daubigny assisted in looking through the portfolio, and many were the small jokes that appeared to pass between them during the search. At last a song was found and placed upon the piano, and Isabelle Carmichael seated herself before it.

Luigia waited for the first notes with an almost breathless anxiety; when they came she sat back with a sigh of relief. There was nothing in them to swell the music-loving soul with a rapture it could not express, there was no vibration in the voice to stir a responsive chord in Luigia's passionate heart. It was strong and clear, and highly trained, and the song was an air from a new French opera, a light, flowery thing, full of shakes and runs, well calculated to exhibit skilful execution; but as far as reaching the heart of the listener is concerned, it was a failure. Luigia looked at her father. He was leaning on the piano in an attitude of deep attention, but when a moth fluttered into the candle near him, he saw it at once, and turned to save the foolish thing. He was not absorbed, riveted, carried away—that she could easily see—and as she watched him from her dark corner, she felt the desire to move him with her own voice rise strongly within her. She was in the mood for music; she longed to use her power over him, to see his face change, to know that she had moved him. She felt her throat swell and her heart beating fast, as, in watching that dark face, every moment the desire grew stronger.

The song was ended. A chorus of thanks showered upon

the performer, which she graciously accepted while turning over her music for another song.

"Not a bad tune!" drawled Lord Bertram condescendingly, turning to Luigia during the pause. "Only one's gettin' a trifle sick of it now, don't you know."

"I never heard it before."

"Oh, come now!" looking at her sleepily, "when every barrel-organ in London grinds away at it all day long."

"But I never was in London in my life."

"*What?*" ejaculated his lordship, raising his eyeglass slowly to scrutinize the young lady who dared make such an assertion. "Come now, you're jokin', Miss Daubigny."

"No, indeed, it is quite true."

"Where on earth *do* you go, then?"

"Nowhere. I have only been away from home once, and that was for a week to Ely."

He stared more than ever.

"Couldn't exist in the country all the year round myself. Horrid bore! don't you know, to be out of the swim of everything. But I suppose the huntin' keeps you alive, don't it?"

"Oh, no. I don't ride. I haven't even a habit."

She fairly laughed at his look of consternation, but Miss Carmichael had begun another song, and the silence demanded by politeness reigned. The Squire crossed the room on tiptoe and bent to whisper in Luigia's ear. "We must have a song from *you* presently. We can't have you hiding your voice and your eyes away in this dark corner the whole evening."

She smiled up at him, and promised with her eyes to favour his request.

Her turn came later on. Lady Adelaide felt that she must not neglect her step-daughter, and she turned to her as Belle rose from the piano.

"Are you at all musical, Luigia? If so, I wish you would oblige us by playing something."

"Or by singing," put in the squire, rubbing his hands together with evident anticipation of enjoyment.

Luigia rose immediately, much to her step-mother's sur-

prise, and walked over to the piano. She sat down and played the opening bars of Schubert's "Appeal," and sang it through. Simple as the song is, it is most difficult to sing; each slow note dwelt upon lingeringly in turn, has its own weight and place, and there is no chance of producing an effect by slurring, hurrying, or drowning with the accompaniment. But she did not fail. Her voice in its exquisite softness and pathos rose and floated through the room and to each listener's heart. She had never heard her mother sing, and did not know that she had inherited from her the voice that had lured more than one man from the path of duty, and brought him to her feet against his will. There was something divine about it, yet there was also something so humanly passionate and emotional that it was impossible to resist its influence. Daubigny, who had stood beside the piano when she first came to it, turned away, and leaned again in the open window, with his back to the room. If he were surprised at this exhibition of her talent he did not choose to show it.

She let her hands fall into her lap when she had finished, and sat still for a minute or two. Lady Adelaide and Miss Carmichael murmured their thanks without evincing any unusual enthusiasm. In reality they were astonished, and both felt at once that Isabelle was entirely eclipsed. Miss Carmichael had scarcely looked at Luigia, and had considered her, in the few words that passed between them, a quiet, uninteresting girl, quite incapable of rivalling her in any way. She no longer felt this. The first notes of that exquisite voice told her that this girl possessed a power over the hearts of her listeners that she could never exercise. She looked at her with new eyes. She saw Lord Bertram lounge over to her side, and beg her to sing again, and she saw Mr. Rodney, with a tear yet undried on his ruddy cheek, go forward and say something to her in a whisper, that caused her to look up at him with a swift, half shy glance. Then, for the first time, she noticed the beauty of her eyes.

She rose and went over to the piano.

"That is a lovely song, but a little too melancholy

for my taste. I prefer something lighter in a general way, especially in a drawing-room and to a mixed audience."

"Do you?"

Luigia flashed her eyes at her, and laid her hands again on the keys. She turned to Mr. Rodney.

"I will sing you the Italian flower-girl's song," she said. "I learnt it especially for you, since you always call me the flower-maiden."

Mr. Rodney's wrinkled old face reddened with pleasure as she sang it to him. She was both audacious and pleading in turns; her face and voice changed swiftly with each change in the mood of the song; she was one moment daring him to buy with laughing impudence, the next she was melting his very soul with the most piteous appeal. He was utterly bewildered and fascinated, and, forgetting everything but Luigia, sat and looked at her and listened to her, spell-bound.

"I didn't understand a word of it," he said, when it was over. "It was all gibberish to me; but I know if you sang like that, you might get what you liked out of me—even to my last penny; and I shouldn't grudge it—no, not if I went a beggar the rest of my days."

She laughed, and went back to her dark corner.

And what did Daubigny think of this daughter of his, who had suddenly emerged from the shadows and forced herself into his notice? He was fascinated by her, and could not turn his eyes away. He leaned in the shadow of the curtained window, and watched her and the men beside her with absorbing closeness. He saw every glance she gave them, and he felt more keenly than either the allurement of her voice. And then, when it was ended, and before he could turn away, she raised her eyes and met his glance, fully and deliberately. What did each see in the other's eyes? Luigia was triumphant. She had moved him; he was not indifferent to her music, as he had been to Miss Carmichael's, and she cared very little for admiration from any one else. She left the piano with a feeling of complete satisfaction, and retreated to her corner, followed

by the gentlemen, who vied with each other in paying her attention.

Daubigny went out into the conservatory, and paced it in the dark.

"How could I have ignored her? How was it I never saw it in her? She is like *her*—painfully like her—dangerous, irresistible, alluring. It will be the same thing over again. She will madden men—and ruin them!"

A few minutes later, when the lamps were brought in and a card-table set out, Daubigny joined the party as calm and unmoved as usual. He gave one hasty, sweeping glance into the dark corner, but the white-robed figure had disappeared, and was not seen again that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT.

THE next morning Lady Adelaide visited Luigia in the schoolroom, and made a thorough investigation of her possessions and acquirements. She underwent the examination calmly enough, and was quite unabashed by each fresh display of her ignorance. Lady Adelaide, after it was over, went straight to her husband's smoking-room, and proceeded to cross-examine him also.

"My dear Eustace, I hope you can spare me a few moments. Are you particularly busy?"

Daubigny admitted that his labours were not of any vital importance, and that Tim, the terrier, who was being instructed in the art of fetching and carrying, could easily postpone his lesson. He put the glove out of reach, forbade the pupil to interrupt the conversation, and placed a chair for Lady Adelaide near the window. She seated herself in it.

"I want to talk to you about your daughter—about Luigia," she said.

"Well?"

He seated himself on a corner of the table, and awaited the coming conversation with any but pleasant anticipations.

"I have been talking to her this morning, and looking through her books, and I must say I am horrified—quite horrified—at her ignorance. She tells me, what I can scarcely believe is strictly true, that she has never learned French nor had a dancing lesson in her life. Can it really be so?"

"I suppose so, if she says it."

She looked at her husband with an incredulous air.

"Do you mean to say that you have done nothing in the way of educating her?"

"She has had governesses, I believe, but I really know very little about it. I have neglected her in every possible way. No beggar child in the streets has been more utterly uncared for."

He spoke almost defiantly, and Lady Adelaide looked at him in surprise.

"It is most extraordinary," she said, "and—really, you must allow me to say it—wrong."

He made no reply; he would neither excuse nor condemn himself, and allowed her to put what construction she chose on his conduct.

"Well," she continued, after a pause in which she evidently expected him to justify himself, "it is not, perhaps, for me to go back into the past; I must simply start with things from the point at which I pick them up. The question now is, what is to be done with her?"

"Done with her?" echoed Daubigny, "why, what on earth *could* be done with her?"

"She must be educated," replied her ladyship, coldly, "that is all I mean—and the question is, how? I know of a very good school in Paris, which Belle attended for some——"

"She shall not go abroad. I strongly object to a Continental education," he interrupted quickly.

"On what ground? Belle has received the whole of her

education abroad, and I do not see that she has suffered in consequence. Why do you disapprove?"

He was silent.

"In my opinion," she continued, "a year or two on the Continent is the making of an English girl. It does away with something of her insular pride and stiffness of manner."

"Luigia is not English, and she has not a stiff manner."

"Not English?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"No," said Daubigny, abruptly. "You know as well as I do that she is partly Italian. There is no need to try and give her what she already naturally inherits. Besides, I particularly object to foreign polish and manner. I prefer the stiff, cold, English pride—in women."

Lady Adelaide had been slightly embarrassed as he touched on the subject of his first marriage. She never remembered to have heard him say as much before, and though, of course, she knew the facts of the case, not a word concerning them had ever passed between them. She hastened now to turn the conversation into a more agreeable channel.

"Well, then, she might go to school at Miss Ponsonby's at Scarboro'. I know Miss Ponsonby personally, and Lady Thomas's daughters were——"

"Why are you so anxious she should go away? Do you want to be rid of her?" he said, suddenly rising and turning away.

"I do not understand you," said Lady Adelaide, haughtily. "Why should I wish to be rid of her, pray?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I spoke without thinking. I beg your pardon."

"Indeed, I think you owe me an apology. I was wishing to act entirely for your daughter's good."

"Yes, yes, I know—of course."

He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was absurdly irritable where Luigia was concerned. He might not love her, but he had the instinct to defend her if any one but spoke her name. He was loyal to those he loved. He had never been known to utter a single word against the wife

who had deserted him, and perhaps his championship of Luigia found its origin in the fact that she was the child of this woman, who had once been everything to him.

"If you attributed to me so mean a motive as that of wishing to leave Belle unrivalled," continued Lady Adelaide, "I can only say that I fear nothing from Luigia, even if I thought about such things, which I do not. She is younger—much younger—and wholly ignorant on all matters that are essential to a girl in society. She is musical, certainly very musical, but that is her only accomplishment."

"And I would far rather she had none than that," he observed moodily.

"Why? I thought you were so fond of music?"

"So I am. It is because I feel its power that I fear it. The musical—the artistic temperament is a most dangerous gift. I would not wish any one belonging to me to possess it."

"You are speaking in exaggeration, I am sure. You are always pleased to hear Belle sing and play—at least you say so. What is the meaning of this sudden dislike?"

"There is music and music. How can I explain? Belle's is a drawing-room accomplishment, a pleasant way of enlivening an evening. She has a pretty voice, and is well trained, and I always enjoy listening to her. But Luigia's music is different."

"How different?"

He was driven into a corner, and forced to explain himself, however little he might wish to do so.

"Her's is genius—emotional, dramatic. No one can listen to her without sharing in any mood she may feel at the moment. Her influence for good or evil over her listeners is very great, and can only be measured by the character of the nature on which it acts. On sensitive and artistic temperaments it would probably be almost unlimited."

Lady Adelaide was somewhat cold and immovable. Daubigny was impulsive and emotional. They were as alien to each other as is the Equator to the North Pole, and, consequently, very often found it impossible to enter into or

understand the light in which each so differently viewed the same subject. She was really fond of him and anxious to understand him, but she often found it impossible. This was one of those occasions. She could catch the sense of his words, but had no light into the meaning that lay beneath them, having never in her life been really moved by a beautiful picture, a romantic story, or a pathetic song. She returned to the original theme, and determined to steer clear of "artistic temperaments" in future.

"Well, Eustace, what do you wish with regard to her education?"

"I don't care. I don't want to be consulted. Send her to France if you like, or keep her at home. She is entirely in your hands now. Do as you think best."

He ended the interview by calling out his dog again, and strolled whistling from the room. From that moment he never alluded to or evinced the slightest interest in his wife's arrangements concerning Luigia. If it had not been that she insisted upon informing him of them, he would have known no more than he did before.

Lady Adelaide did not send Luigia to school. She engaged a "finishing governess" for her, who demanded a high salary and every consideration. The finishing governess, Miss Elliot by name, was almost paralyzed by the state of ignorance in which she found her pupil, and Luigia was forthwith put under a severe *régime*. The schoolroom was replenished with books, globes, pens and ink, and the old holland aprons were brought forth again. Miss Elliot found Luigia both the most industrious and at the same time the most idle pupil she had ever come across. She would work morning, noon, and night over subjects that interested her, and yet she could not be induced to take the slightest trouble over the tasks that were uncongenial. It was in vain to threaten or implore. She was deaf and indifferent to both reason and argument, and pursued her own course in the path of learning.

"You are so inconsistent!" cried poor Miss Elliot in despair one day. "Nothing will induce you to give me your attention when I take up the arithmetic or grammar,

yet you will sit for hours over a French or German poem of which you hardly understand a word. There is no order or method about your work."

"No," said Luigia, leaning her head on her hand, and biting the end of her pen, "I was born without either, and I hate them both from the bottom of my soul."

"Hate order and method! How very shocking! Why, they are the basis of everything—nothing can be done without them. Look at music, for instance—your favourite study—would you be able to play and sing if you had not practised regularly every day?"

"I practise because I like it, and because I cannot possibly keep away. I never went to the piano in my life from a sense of duty."

Miss Elliot sighed.

"You will make a most inconsistent—a most unsatisfactory woman," she said. "People who act from impulse, and not from principle, are often very wicked."

"How can people help their natures? If I was born bad, it will be impossible to make me good. And there is bad blood in my veins. Every one says so." She held out her hand and examined it minutely, tracing the veins on it with the quill of her pen. "I cannot help it if I am bad," she continued, "any more than a nettle can help stinging. We are made so."

"I cannot allow you to say such things," exclaimed Miss Elliot, much shocked at this reckless way of talking. "It is really very wrong."

"Scold the stinging-nettle for stinging," said Luigia with a little laugh as she put away her books. "It will have just as much effect."

This little conversation shows the deep impression the careless words of servants years ago had made on her. She might have been very different if she had not been impregnated from her babyhood with the idea that she was destined to do wrong.

Poor Luigia! Everything was against her from the day of her mother's flight. Francesca Daubigny had sinned against her husband when she fled from his house with her

lover, leaving him a hopeless, reckless man, but she had sinned far more against her innocent little daughter. From that moment Luigia was looked upon with mysterious dread, neglected by her father, and stigmatized by all who saw her as the child of a sinful woman. She was weighted from her very start in life with the curse of being flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone—a doom from which it was impossible to escape.

The first wrong act—how far does it go? Immeasurably farther than the actor ever knows. Evil-doing, however slight, has no end. It is like the stone dropped into the water—the circles spread wider and wider till one loses count. So it is with the secret ways of sin.

The first link in Francesca Daubigny's chain of wrong-doing was wrought when she married a man she did not love. She thought she realized fully the extent of that evil, and that it ended within the range of her vision, but she was mistaken. She could not foresee the many other links stretching away into the dim future—her own ruin, the wreck of her husband's affections, energy and faith in human nature, the neglect of her child, the results of that neglect, and again—the whole new chain that grew and was fettered, link by link, around unknown people in the unknown future from the hand of that little daughter for whom she was responsible.

From the day of her step-mother's arrival at the Hall, Luigia's life was a completely different one. She was confined to the schoolroom during the day, but dined with the family unless there were visitors, and spent the evening in the drawing-room. Lady Adelaide considered her not yet old enough to make her formal *entrée* into society, but she was determined her husband should not accuse her of treating her otherwise than as her own daughter. So it came to pass that Luigia and her father were thrown together every day. He rarely spoke to her, and it was Belle who sat on his right hand at dinner, and received the greater part of his attention, but for all that, he saw her, marked every detail of her appearance, and was acutely sensitive to her slightest movement or remark. She and all her habits and

opinions were becoming exceedingly interesting to him, though, through reserve and pride, he concealed the fact. Luigia herself knew of no change in his feeling towards her.

But, although Daubigny slighted her, she was no longer neglected. Her stepmother was kind to her, Isabelle was friendly, and Lord Bertram, who constantly rode over from Friarsgate, was condescendingly attentive. About the same time, too, another young cousin of Belle's came to stay at the Hall with his tutor while preparing for Sandhurst, and immediately fell head over ears in love with her.

Alan Carmichael was about her own age, but, in spite of this fact, she treated him as a mere boy, and accepted his extravagant worship as a thing of no account. He, on his side, became her champion on all occasions, and fought her battles, both just and unjust, with a dogged obstinacy worthy of a better cause.

He was an ugly fellow, over six feet high, lanky and loose-jointed, with high cheek-bones, a freckled skin, and sandy hair. But she was kind to him, very kind, with a touch of submission in her manner that aroused in him a devotion as chivalrous as it was blind. He spent all his spare time with her, to the neglect of his studies; he taught her to ride, to row, and to dance. The last-named art they practised on landings and passages after lessons were over, without the aid of music, and often in the dark. Before a month had passed, young Alan Carmichael was as far gone as it is possible for youth to go, victimized by that most virulent of all diseases—love. The little schoolroom was a paradise, Luigia's eyes were heavenly stars, her hand—the hand he clasped in his—was something too precious to be named, her very dress was enchanted and unearthly.

There was nothing wrong in all this; they had but conferred mutual instruction. He had taught her to dance, and she had taught him to love. What young lady with any sense of justice could have done otherwise?

CHAPTER IX.

THE SQUIRE'S MANIA.

THE old squire of Rodney was seized with a mania for business that winter; he was constantly running up to London on some important matter, the nature of which he never explained. This new craze provoked further rumours among his neighbours and tenants, and it was whispered that the squire "went a-courting" to London, and that the "blue-eyed young lady" lived somewhere in that region. It was observed, too, by the sharp-eyed of the village, that he never returned from these visits without an entirely new set of clothes, each being of a more fashionable and expensive design than the last. This was, of course, conclusive; no further evidence was needed. The squire was courting beyond a doubt, and it only remained to find out the name of the lady. This was difficult, since the inhabitants of Rodney were quiet, stay-at-home people, and so the village had to wait open-mouthed and dying of suspense till such a season as the squire thought fit to reveal his secret.

Mr. Rodney himself was in a dozen different minds a day. He had never felt so confused and uncertain in his life; he had not the vaguest idea of what he meant to do, and only one conviction—namely, that he was a fool. In each of his journeys to London he found time, in spite of press of business, to run down to the Hall, if it were only for an hour or two. He was fond of Daubigny, he respected Lady Adelaide, and he admired Belle Carmichael. But Daubigny need not have flattered himself that these constant visits were to him, Lady Adelaide was a person of little consequence beyond her position as hostess, and the blue-eyed young lady might lavish her smiles on him or treat him to frowns without causing him a single palpitation of the heart. Alan Carmichael, too, came and went, and it was a matter of indifference. Who was it, then, that proved the attraction? Only a dark-eyed school-girl a slip of a creature with black hair and a soft voice. The squire, in

spite of all his sixty summers, would redden and stammer when she who had known but seventeen came near him. It was no use calling himself a fool and an ass—it did not even relieve his feelings, and the fact remained the same. She was a child, a mere baby, and he was old enough to be her grandfather—even her great-grandfather at a pinch! He went home, but the house seemed dull and empty; he was irritable with the servants, uninterested in his old pursuits, restless and lonely, and time hung heavily on his hands. It was only natural, therefore, that another pressing matter of business should await him in London, the importance of which was so great that neither deep snow nor high winds could induce him to postpone his journey. And yet—what satisfaction did he get from these glimpses of Luigia with which he feasted his eyes once a fortnight? None whatever. They only served to confirm him in his "foolery," and to make him more certain than ever that it was foolery, without one single grain of redeeming commonsense.

At last, on the sixth of these flying visits to the Hall, and a clearer insight than ever into the subject of Luigia's extreme youthfulness and indifference to him, he made up his mind thoroughly and finally to go away, and not come back until he was cured. Luigia was a child, and he was an old man, and there was something wicked and inhuman in the idea of taking her for his wife; he would entertain the idea and the desire no longer; he would say good-bye to her in a kind and fatherly manner, and go back to Rodney and his turnips without letting any one into his foolish secret. He came to this resolution slowly, and with much reflection, but, once made, it was not to be broken, and he prepared to carry it out with a heavy heart. He told Daubigny he must leave by the six o'clock train, and travel half through the night, in order to reach home for a most important engagement next morning. Daubigny, though sorry to lose him earlier than he had expected, offered no opposition, and ordered the dog-cart to be ready at five. The poor squire took out his watch. It was then four; he had, therefore, just an hour before he started on that dismal journey back to Rod-

ney, from which he had resolved no more business, however urgent, should lure him for the next six months.

He wandered about the room in a restless, aimless way, with his hands in his pockets and an inclination on him to whistle melancholy airs. There was no hope of seeing Luigia—she was at her lessons. Oh, the irony of that fact! Fate was indeed cruel when it brought his grey hairs to such a pass! Five o'clock! She would scarcely have finished before he had to go. But he could go up to the schoolroom and say good-bye; Miss Elliot would not object to that, and her presence in the room would make it safe, and allow of a word or two of fatherly affection perhaps. Yes, it would be as well on the whole that the governess should be there, for who knew what Luigia's eyes might not do with him in a weak moment.

The hour came, and with it the dog-cart to the door. The squire bade adieu to Lady Adelaide and Belle on the drawing-room hearthrug, and followed Daubigny through the hall towards the hated vehicle. On the door-mat, however, he was suddenly struck by an idea which brought him to a standstill.

"I declare I've not said good-bye to—to Luigia," he exclaimed, as naturally as he could, turning a shade ruddier than usual. "There's time, I suppose?"

"Oh, there's time," replied Daubigny, carelessly, turning up the collar of his ulster in preparation for the snowy drive. "Only there's no need whatever to bother about it."

"No bother at all! I'll just run up. I shouldn't like her to think I'd forgotten her. Won't be a minute."

With all his good resolutions strong upon him, the old squire mounted the staircase. It would be rude, disagreeable, ungentlemanly to go off like a bear without a word of farewell to her—he couldn't possibly bring himself to do such a thing! He was not going to be rash or foolish; he was not going to say one tender thing; he should simply put his head round the door with a "Good-bye, Luigia," and then, when they had shaken hands, he should retire without another word or glance.

He found himself at the schoolroom door before he knew

where he was, and he had entered before he had quite mustered up courage to do so. In fact, he had no more idea of what he was about than the man in the moon.

The schoolroom was dingy and dark, and the fire burned low, and Miss Elliot was not there. The divinity sat at the table, with its head on its hand in a dejected attitude, a slate pencil in its mouth, and a slate adorned with a long column of figures on its knee. It wore a holland apron, somewhat crumpled, and its hair was loosened and drooped carelessly over the forehead and ears. It sighed as the Squire of Rodney entered (the plan of merely putting the head round the door having been abandoned at first sight of Luigia), and looked up with eyes in which there was just a suspicion of unshed tears.

"Oh, Mr. Rodney, do help me with this sum. I have got to find the average age of boys at a school, and the answer *will* come out seventy-nine. It doesn't sound right, does it?"

The squire, if he had not formed certain resolutions on the subject, could have told her of cases in which men of sixty felt remarkably like boys of sixteen, but he refrained, and gave his attention entirely to the subject in hand. It was, of course, deeply interesting to him, for if the accurate average age of those boys could not be ascertained, the unshed tears in those deep dark eyes might overflow, and then what an insupportable calamity that would be! He could not bear the mere idea. He went down on his knees on the schoolroom floor at Luigia's side and took the slate into his own hands. She, meanwhile, sat nibbling her pencil in utter unconsciousness of the various emotions that were struggling in his breast.

"I hate sums!" she said, "especially when there's ice. Alan has gone skating, and I had to stay behind. And what does it matter about the average age of boys? Besides, I believe it *is* seventy-nine, for I have done it three times."

"My dear," said the squire solemnly, "boys of seventy-nine never go to school. The thing is unheard of."

"It might be a school for *backward boys*," suggested

the divinity, scribbling on the edge of the slate in an idle manner.

Now the Squire of Rodney had never been more serious in his life than he was at that minute. He was, therefore, much surprised, on looking round, to find the suspicion of a mischievous smile hovering round the corners of her mouth. Everything was forgotten in that glance—prudence, resolutions, Daubigny, the dog-cart—everything but Luigia, the schoolgirl. He suddenly pushed the slate with its unsolved problem away from him, and said as impetuously as any hot-headed youth—

"You say you hate lessons. If you would come and live with me you shouldn't have any. You should do just as you liked all day long."

"How nice!" said Luigia, "but they will never let me come. The holidays are over, you know."

Her simple words brought him to his senses; he saw that she was quite unconscious of his real meaning, and he determined to say no more. Visions of Daubigny impatient and the waiting dog-cart flitted before his eyes, and he rose to his feet.

"I must go," he said. "I ought not to have stayed so long. I am returning to Rodney to-night, you know."

"Are you? I am so sorry." Softly, "Well, good-bye, then," and she put her hand into his.

"Good-bye," said the poor squire. Then, with another impulse, as he felt her fingers lying so confidingly in his, he added: "And I did not mean a *visit*—I meant to *live always*—for ever—to make it your home."

Then he went on rapidly before she could make any answer: "I am sure you would like it; it is such a cosy old place, with plenty of fruit and flowers in the garden, and as many horses and dogs as you like—you like dogs, don't you? And there is a pond I could have enlarged for you to skate on in the winter, and you could have—well, anything else in the world you chose to fancy, you know."

Luigia was looking at him with fascinated, almost frightened eyes, during his speech, but she made no at-

tempt to draw away her hand, and stood silent and pale before him.

"Do you understand me?" said the squire, anxiously.

"I'm not quite sure," she said.

"I would ask you to be my wife, my dear, if I were not such an old fellow compared to you," he said wistfully. "You ought to have a handsome young husband, only a few years older than yourself. But I can't help it; I am a fool, a weak-minded old fool, I dare say, but I'm sure I care for you as much or more than any man ever will, however young and handsome he may be."

"Oh, no one cares for me," she said, shaking her head. She turned away, and with her hand still in his, looked out into the gloom of the winter's evening with a sad and thoughtful air.

"Don't say that!" cried the old gentleman. "I tell you *I* care for you—love you—love you heartily—admire you—would give everything I have to have you always with me."

She turned her eyes from the gloom back to him.

"Well, you may have me, then," she said, "for no one wants me here, and you are so kind I think I should like to live with you."

"My dear," said the old squire, in a trembling voice, "don't decide hastily. Remember it is a lifelong matter. You can never draw back."

"I shall not want to. You care for me, and no one else does."

"You shall have whatever you want," he repeated, with an uncomfortable feeling that he was taking advantage of her, and anxious to make the bargain as liberal as possible.

"Thank you," she said gravely.

"You shall have anything in heaven or earth that I can give you," he cried impetuously, "if you will come and be my little wife, Luigia."

"Very well," said Luigia, "I will come." And so the bargain was agreed upon.

He did not dare to kiss her. Her extreme youth and innocence shielded her from anything like familiarity, and placed her in an atmosphere that he did not dare disturb.

He merely raised her hand to his lips and kissed that. The fingers were inky from her recent labours with the pen, and as he saw it he smiled. She smiled too, rather shyly.

"I always make blots when I write," she said, "and as to my arithmetic—it never comes right! You will be shocked at my ignorance when you find it out. I am being 'finished' as they call it, although I have never been 'begun.'"

"Poor little thing!" kissing the inky fingers yet again, "but I like ignorance, as I told you once before. I shall be prouder of my ignorant, childish wife than any man ever was of the cleverest woman upon earth. We shan't want much learning down at Rodney, shall we? We will manage to enjoy ourselves without it, eh?"

A sound of footsteps was heard coming along the passage, and the squire, dropping her hand with guilty haste, made for the door. The next instant Miss Elliot entered, and, with a muttered apology for trespassing on her premises, he passed her and escaped. He tramped down the passage and the stairs in a tumult of conflicting feelings. He had won the young creature with the mournful dark eyes and soft fingers, who seemed to him the only bit of poetry he had come across in his life, but could he make her happy? She had entrusted herself to him, but was he capable of fulfilling that trust? A strange sinking of the heart mingled with the joy that made it beat so fast.

CHAPTER X.

LUIGIA'S WORLDLY WISDOM.

Squire Rodney reached the hall, and was met at the library door by Daubigny, who no longer wore his ulster.

"You've lost the train," he said, "so make the best of it, and come and have a smoke. I had half a mind to come up and see what you were about, you were such an unconscionable time."

He linked his arm in his, and drew him into the library.

"I've sent the trap back to the stables. There isn't another train till 9.30. So you must dine with us anyway; and, upon my word, I shall think it very unfriendly if you insist upon turning out at that time of night. Throw over the engagement, whatever it is, and stay with us a day or two longer."

"Well," said the squire, seating himself straddlewise over a chair, and looking into the fire with an expression of deep deliberation, "I don't know whether I won't after all, since you ask me."

"Haven't I asked you a dozen times already, my dear fellow?"

"Well," said the squire, wrinkling up his ruddy face into keen appreciation of the joke, "I've made another engagement now—a more important one, on the whole—in fact, never entered into anything more serious in my life."

"What on earth do you mean?" said Daubigny, struck by his manner.

"I mean that I've asked Luigia to be my wife."

"The devil you have," he cried with sudden vehemence. "What madness is this? I don't understand."

"The long and short of it is, I'm bewitched," said the squire, revelling in the joke. "I'm a fool, I own it frankly, but I can't help it. I made enough resolutions to keep a fellow safe, especially an old fellow like me, but not one of 'em could stand firm. They went down like ninepins the first time she looked at me."

Daubigny kicked the smouldering log on the hearth into a blaze, and turned to scrutinize his companion with a dark scowl on his face.

"Go on," he said.

"I intended to run away from her, but it wouldn't work. I went to say good-bye for ever, and in the same breath I asked her to be my wife. Heaven alone knows how or why. It is absurd! preposterous!—but I rather like it!"

"You must be mad," was Daubigny's reply, "raving mad. I see no other solution of your conduct."

"You are uncommonly polite," he returned, chuckling

good-humouredly, "and I might quarrel with you if I hadn't pretty much the same opinion myself. However, we are all apt to be the victim of madness at some period of our lives. Mine has come on late, you see, and I rather enjoy the novelty of the disease."

Daubigny thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets and paced the room, his usual mode of proceeding when agitated.

"I shall not allow it," he said at last, confronting the squire on the hearthrug, and looking down on him as he sat in the light of the flickering fire. "I utterly and entirely refuse my consent."

"My dear fellow, what is the good of doing that? She has given me her promise, and I intend to have her, with or without consent—by hook or by crook."

"Indeed!" cried Daubigny, with a flash in his eyes. "You seem to forget that I am her father."

"No," said the squire, rising and speaking very seriously for the first time during the interview, "I have not forgotten it—but if I had, would it have been very remarkable? Forgive my plain speaking. I am a man who speaks his mind. It was your neglect of her that first brought her before my notice. I pitied her, and then I learned to love her. She was never a favourite of yours, and she knows it; she has not been happy here, and what wonder is it if she is willing to go away? I have offered her my home, and she has accepted it, for she has had neither love nor home in this house."

Daubigny turned on his heel and paced the room again. The squire stood with his back to the fire, and pulled his coat-tails through his arms. It was a pugnacious attitude, and he spoke pugnaciously.

"She wants to come to me, and I mean to have her. Therefore, Daubigny, much as I like you, I shall not consider your wishes in the matter. Her will shall be law. If she wants to break it off to-morrow, I shall set her free, but if she doesn't, I shall stick to it through all the opposition in the world."

"Do as you like," said Daubigny, coming back to the

hearth, and leaning against the mantelpiece in a dejected attitude. "It is as you say—I am a father to her only in name, I cannot begin to control her actions, and say what she shall or shall not do so late in the day as this. She can act as she chooses—it is not for me to interfere."

The Squire of Rodney took his hand and held it in both his own.

"My dear boy, don't talk so bitterly, or I shall feel more like a robber than—than a *son-in-law!*"

His eyes twinkled as he uttered the last word, but Daubigny remained profoundly grave.

"Why didn't you choose the other?" he said. "Why wasn't it Belle?"

"Because," replied the squire, "she cannot make your heart jump into your mouth by just lifting her eyes, and because she cannot twist you round her little finger, however stout and elderly you may happen to be, and because she cannot make you laugh and cry with her singing, and—oh! a hundred other reasons. Principally and finally, because she did not make me fall in love with her. Do you understand?"

"Yes," he said, with a sigh. "I understand only too well. I learned the same lesson once."

That evening Luigia was shy, and did not go down to dinner. Immediately after the meal was over Belle visited her in the schoolroom, curious to see what she would say and do under the new circumstances. She found her alone, sitting over the fire. Her attitude was despondent, her head resting on her hand, her hair, still loosened and neglected, drooping over her cheek. She roused herself as Belle entered, and looked up with a faint smile.

"What is this I hear?" cried that young lady, dropping on her knees beside her in her most gushing style. "Is it really true—this most extraordinary and wonderful news?"

"I suppose so."

"You queer little creature! What an idea! Why, he's ever so ancient! What made you think of such a thing?"

"He asked me."

"Yes, and so may dozens of men, but that is no reason for accepting them. What made you accept him?"

She was silent.

"It isn't because he is young and handsome and fascinating, most certainly. What a worldly little thing you are, Luigia! Mama is quite amazed at your cleverness. He is as rich as Crœsus, and his friends have been trying to marry him for years!"

Luigia changed her attitude, and clasping her hands round her knees, looked drearily into the fire.

"Money has nothing to do with it," she said.

"Oh, nonsense! Little girls of seventeen don't marry their grandfathers for love—dear, kind old man as he is! You are a clever, designing, worldly little creature, in spite of all your innocent ways. I should never have believed it of you!"

"He is kind to me," said Luigia.

"Well, my dear, are not we all kind to you?" she said, struck by the sadness of the tone in which this remark was made, and she took Luigia's hand and held it on her knee.

"Oh, yes," she said, but the voice was listless.

"Well, you are engaged before me after all!" Belle went on after a pause, "though, of course, I have had plenty of offers. There was that wretched creature Mr. Blythe, at the school-treat over at Friarsgate the other day, came up and stammered through something like a proposal—as though I could ever bring myself to marry a man with a beard! And that same evening I had one from Major Dunlop. Rather amusing, wasn't it—two in one day like that? But they all have the *Belle fever* over at Friarsgate."

"There is no need for *you* to marry," said Luigia, looking into the heart of the fire.

"Oh, but I must some day, I suppose. In fact, I am to be Mrs. Jean Ingram, whenever Mr. Jean Ingram chooses to make me a formal offer."

"Who is he?"

"Another cousin of mine—they swarm, you know. He

is Lord Cranburn's heir, and is coming into the title and property when the old man dies. But he *won't* die—that is the worst of it. He goes on living for ever—sleeping on an iron mattress, and getting up at six like the Duke of Wellington—you know the sort of constitution! And, in the mean time, poor Jean hangs about, not knowing what to do with himself."

"Is he nice—Mr. Ingram?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That is according to taste. He isn't good-looking, but he's clever—horribly clever. He has an alarming amount of information on every possible and impossible subject, but he's so cynical. He thinks nothing of himself or anybody else. He criticises everything till there's nothing left. If you like that sort of man, well and good, but, if you don't, you hate him. He can be very disagreeable, I assure you."

"When are you going to be married?"

"My dear, how shockingly frank you are! Why, we are not even engaged. There is no hurry. We both know it must come in the end, and we are quite willing to postpone the crisis a little longer."

"But why must you marry him?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly, but I've always known it—so has he. Our properties lie together, and all that—though mine isn't worth much, I'm sorry to say. We are destined for each other, and I suppose it is inevitable."

"I wouldn't marry a man if I didn't like him."

"Wouldn't you?" laughing. "Why, you'd marry him in a minute if he asked you, just for the title and the property, for you're the most calculating little minx in the world. But to tell you the truth, I like him better than any one else. There's a certain amount of interest in trying to strike a spark from a flint. If you get the spark it is worth a good deal."

"Do you really think I am designing and calculating?" said Luigia, turning her face away into the shadow.

"Of course I do. Who could think otherwise? But I don't suppose you could ever fall in love as other girls do,

so it's all right, I suppose. You never seem to care much about anything."

"No?"

"No. Mama was talking to me about it just now. She says you are the kind of girl who has no sentimental fancies to stand in your way, and that when you are left a rich young widow, you will marry again—some one young and handsome. She says you are wise beyond your years."

Luigia turned back from the shadows, and looked at Belle with great, fascinated eyes. Was she accused of such heartless calculations as these with regard to the man she had promised to marry? The idea was horrible! but she did not deny it. What was the use of words if they understood her so little?

The next day, late in the afternoon, she was sent for to the drawing-room. Belle was pouring out tea at a little gipsy-table near the fire, Lady Adelaide sat at her embroidery frame, and the squire stood in his favourite attitude on the hearthrug with his coat-tails through his arms.

"We were obliged to send for you in self-defence," said Belle, as Luigia entered. "The squire has been so dreadfully restless, and asked so many questions about you, that we could bear it no longer. He couldn't wait till dinner time, he said."

"I was afraid the fairies had cheated me out of my luck, and whisked you off," he said, coming forward to take her hand. "What have you been doing with yourself all day? I haven't caught a glimpse of you."

"I have been at my lessons. And, oh, do you know, I have found out the average age of the boys at that school, after all."

"Really?" and he looked as keenly interested as if she were about to inform him of some tremendous scientific discovery. "What was it, then?"

"Only fourteen. I made a mistake in the way I worked it."

"Not a bit of it! I'd back your way against all the arithmetic books in the world. I hate accuracy. Here,

come and sit down by the fire and forget all about it, and talk to me instead."

He waited on her with tea and cake. Belle teased them a little, but they did not seem to care. As for Luigia, she could not have borne herself with greater calmness had she been engaged all her life.

When Lady Adelaide and Belle went to dress for dinner, Luigia rose to follow them, but the squire stopped her.

"I have something to show you—something to give you," he said, fumbling in his waistcoat-pocket, and producing a tiny jewel-case. "I went to London to-day on a very important matter." He opened the box, and disclosed a ring glittering with a mass of diamonds. "I could not find one good enough till I saw this," he said. "I hope you like it."

"Is it for me?" looking up.

"Of course"—in a voice that trembled against his will—"who else should I buy rings for? Give me your hand."

She held out the right. The little mistake seemed to bring before him more strongly than ever the fact of her extreme youth and ignorance. He took it, and drew her a little closer to him, looking down into her eyes anxiously.

"Luigia, my poor little darling, do you quite understand what you are doing? Do you realize what you are about?"

"Oh, yes; it was very stupid of me"—still looking up into his face—"I ought to have given you my left, oughtn't I?"

"Am I to put on the ring? Are you willing to be bound, then?"

He took the childish hand almost reluctantly, and slipped the ring on to her finger. It was a very heavy, handsome ring, far too heavy and handsome for the hand that bore it, and the diamonds glittered almost painfully in the firelight. At any rate, if they were not painful to the two who were plighting their troth, they hurt the eyes of Daubigny, who just then entered the room.

Was this stout old gentleman to take for his wife the childish creature who put her hand so confidingly into his? It must not be. He would forbid the unnatural act, and

claim a right over his daughter. He moved forward to do so, but even as he went the words on his lips were changed, and he spoke quite apart from the feeling in his heart. Had he uttered them there is no knowing how the story of Luigia's life would have ended.

"I am sorry to interrupt so interesting a scene," he began sarcastically, "but, prosaic as it may be, the dinner-gong——"

He never finished his sentence, for, while he was yet speaking, Luigia wrenched her hand from the squire's grasp, fled past him like a hunted thing, and disappeared in the darkness of the hall. Daubigny turned to stare after her.

"What is the meaning of that?" he said grimly.

"Haven't an idea!" returned the squire, shortly. Then, parting his coat-tails again for the better warming of his lower person, he added, "I'm glad she doesn't run away from *me* like that!"

Daubigny made no reply, and, throwing himself into a chair, buried himself behind the newspaper.

On the staircase she met Alan Carmichael, who stopped her. He looked taller and more gaunt than ever, and was pale and heavy-eyed.

"What is this they tell me?" he said, in a voice that vainly strove to smother its emotion. "I do not—I will not believe it till I hear it from your own lips."

"It is quite true," she said, in a low voice.

"True? Then all the rest was false! Why did you let me learn to love you if you meant to marry some one else? Why did you let me hold your hand and look into your beautiful eyes? Did you think I could do that without getting mad with love? But I see how it is—you must make a grand marriage. I am too poor, too insignificant. You must marry a millionaire, whether you care for him or not."

She did not speak, and he went on after a pause, catching her hand on which shone the newly given ring.

"This is not like the ring *I* should have given you. Mine would have been paid for with money I had pinched day and night to save. You have sold yourself for riches!"

She tried to pass him, and turned away her head.

"I will not let you speak to me if you say such things," she said.

He caught her hand again, crying out—

"Forgive me, Luigia. I am mad and suspicious, but I am too wretched and hopeless to know what I am saying. Why"—he bent towards her and lowered his voice—"why did you let me kiss you, Luigia? I can never forget it."

"You may kiss me still," she said calmly. "No one else does. *He* did not."

He saw her beautiful eyes shining through the gloom; he saw her soft lips drooping with the piteous droop of self-pity, and he had a hard struggle between his love for her and his sense of honour.

"No," he said at last, "not when you belong to somebody else. Though I am poor, I am not a thief," and he stalked off with his head held proudly erect.

CHAPTER XI.

JEAN INGRAM'S WARNING.

It was the day before the wedding, and preparations for the ceremony filled everybody's mind.

The only guests staying in the house were Mr. Rodney's niece Mrs. Harburton, and her husband, the Major, just home from India. The squire took rooms for himself and his servant at an hotel, but spent most of his time at the Hall in the company of his future bride.

Luigia herself, although she was the heroine of the hour, took things very quietly. She was at everybody's beck and call without a murmur, never tired, never cross, never anything but grateful and willing to be pleased. She, less than any one in the house, was disturbed by the excitement around her.

Jean Ingram, the only other guest invited to the house,

arrived in the afternoon of the day before the wedding. He was ushered into the drawing-room, where he found Belle alone, dressed in an elegant tea-gown, writing letters. She threw down her pen as he entered, and rose to meet him.

"My dear Jean, I am so glad you have come. We are all quite distracted! I am answering innumerable notes, and feel quite dazed. A wedding is far harder work than giving a ball, I find."

He shook hands, and sat down opposite her.

"It is astonishing to me that people ever get married," he said, "when they know what a disturbance it creates."

"Oh, the bride and bridegroom have nothing to do but enjoy themselves," cried Belle, anxious to disabuse his mind of such disagreeable impressions with regard to marriage. "*They* have no bother. This child Luigia has a very easy time of it compared to mama and me; but then she never has any sense of responsibility about anything, it is true. She goes her own way, and lets things arrange themselves."

"She must be an unusually sensible young lady!"

"Oh, it's her disposition. She has no feelings, and doesn't care a bit if her dress doesn't fit. I believe that if mama said she must be married in one of her old school pinafores, she would be perfectly willing. She is most unnaturally phlegmatic—considering that she is only just eighteen, too!"

"And the bridegroom," said Mr. Ingram, "is a very ancient person, I understand? What a charming *ménage* it will be—*till the other man turns up.*"

"The other man?" said Belle, looking at him inquiringly. "Who is the other man?"

"Oh, I don't know his name—neither does she yet, I suppose. But there will be a third to the story one of these days, as surely as my name is Ingram. Everybody recognizes that fact, of course, whether they own it or not."

"I am ashamed of you, Jean," said Belle, flushing a little, and rising from her seat in indignation. "You have no right to say such things—and to *me*, too! It is most insulting——"

"I beg your pardon," returned Mr. Ingram, with a slight

shrug of his shoulders. "I forgot I was not in Paris. I will endeavour to respect your prejudices in future. A thousand apologies! English women are so frantically shocked if one alludes to a spade as a spade, but I had forgotten that pretty little trait of theirs, having lived so long out of England."

He walked over to one of the windows as he spoke, and stood there looking out on to the sunny gardens, with a contemptuous smile on his lips.

He was a short, thin, frigid young man, with refined, accentuated features, keen, critical eyes, a cold manner, and deliberate speech. He was known to be clever, even brilliant, and had he not been heir to his uncle's title and position, would probably long ago have done something to distinguish his name among men. As it was, he had studied surgery for some years in a dilettante way, both in Paris and Vienna, and gone in for experimental science to a certain extent, but without any definite aim or object. His writings were well known among a certain set, and his reputation was above the average. His contributions to the literature of the day were entirely on medical or scientific subjects, and his style curt, dry, decided, forcible. He allowed neither eloquence nor imagery, and went straight to his point in the shortest manner possible. His talent was unquestionable, and men of his world were apt to declare that the brilliance of his career was ruined by waiting to step into dead men's shoes, instead of putting his hand to the plough with the will to work. Had he been a poor man dependent upon his own exertions, he would have been a brilliant success; as it was, he did nothing.

There might have been yet another cause that acted as a clog on the wheel of his good fortune, and kept him from rising, yet no one knew the rights of the story, and no one ventured more than a dark hint concerning it. There were rumours of some tremendous love-affair when he was quite a young man, in which a duel, pistols, and dying speeches formed but a small and insignificant part. His aunt Lady Adelaide, who professed to have a correct version of the affair, declared that he was engaged to be married to an exquisitely beautiful French marquise, who, a week before the

marriage, was discovered in an intrigue with a nobleman of her own nationality. Jean Ingram called him out, and shot him dead on the spot. He then visited the lady and informed her, hat in hand, of his extreme regret at having been compelled by circumstances to blow out the brains of her friend, Monsieur le duc, but assured her that he should not feel called upon to interfere further in her affairs, and trusted that she would be able to console herself for the loss without serious injury to her health.

A lady in Paris, however, who was probably far more behind the scenes than Lady Adelaide, gave a totally different version of the story. The heroine was a beautiful Russian serf whom he had befriended in Paris, and whom he was prevented from marrying by the ignominy of her birth. That she possessed his heart, however, was certain, and that while she lived he would marry no one else was firmly believed by those who knew him best. Lady Adelaide refused altogether to credit this story, and took care that no rumour of it should reach Belle's ears. He was a talented and virtuous young man, devoted to progress in science and medicine, and incapable of any but the most blameless and exemplary of lives. Lady Adelaide's faith in him was such that all the mountains in the world could have been moved by it collectively had she chosen to exert herself in that direction.

Belle had just turned to her letter-writing, anxious to finish the note in hand, when the squire entered the room.

"How de do? Glad to see you," he said, shaking hands heartily with Ingram. "Where's Luigia?" looking round him in a lost way.

"Oh, no one knows where Luigia is," cried Belle, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders; "with her jackdaw probably."

"Have you seen her yet?" continued the squire, turning to Ingram, with a face brimful of smiling pride. "No? Then come with me, and we'll find her. She is sure to be in the gardens somewhere."

Mr. Ingram distinctly preferred the cool fragrance of the drawing-room and the society of his cousin to the hot gar-

dens in search of the squire's *fiancée*. However, he rose obediently, and the squire, linking his arm in his, led him out on to the terrace.

It was a glorious afternoon. Every leaf and twig glistened in the dazzling sunshine; the very stones of the terrace burned the bare hand.

They walked through the gardens without finding a trace of Luigia, and at last the squire, struck by a happy thought, suggested the lake. And there, as they approached it, they saw her far away in a punt under the shade of the trees.

"There's my little girl!" cried Mr. Rodney, his face lighting up as he caught sight of her. "I wonder what she is doing. But, hush! Let us take her by surprise."

He crept round the margin of the lake on tip-toe, screened from observation by the bushes, and Ingram followed. They peeped at her through the brambles and underwood—the squire with his finger to his lips to impress silence.

The sunshine was gleaming on the waters of the lake, except where the overhanging trees threw a deep shadow near the bank. On the opposite shore Luigia had fixed her punt, and was sitting motionless in the cool gloom of the close-leaved willows that drooped over the water. She was looking straight before her, with eyes that saw nothing of her surroundings, her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands. She was lost in dreams, and, to judge by her expression, they were rather sad ones. The old flat straw hat was tilted to the back of her head, the well-worn holland pinafore, of antiquated cut, was donned again for the last time. On her knees lay the hideous rag doll that had been the friend and chief companion of her solitary childhood; on her shoulder perched the jackdaw; at her feet sat a Skye terrier, with hanging tongue, and bright eyes gleaming through his tangled mass of hair. A Persian kitten played with its own tail in the bottom of the punt, and two silver-grey rabbits nibbled lettuce-leaves at the further end. It was a happy family—happy except for Luigia, whose profile showed signs of a profound melancholy. There were

even tears upon her cheek, or so the squire imagined, and a queer mixture of sadness, tenderness, and shame filled his face.

It was evident to both men that she was taking a farewell of her childhood in a well-beloved spot, and had gathered together her favourites for the last time. She had come there to be alone with them, to kiss and cry over them undisturbed. With a guilty feeling the squire turned to go as quietly as he had come, but a second impulse turned him back again.

"Why, Luigia, what are you doing there all alone?" he cried out cheerfully. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

She looked round quickly, and a little smile of welcome flitted over her face.

"It is cool here," she said.

"Come," he continued, pulling at the rope that moored the punt, and hauling it through the water-lilies to the bank. "Here is Mr. Ingram waiting all impatience to be introduced. Ingram, this is Luigia."

She looked at him shyly. She had never seen him before, but she guessed he was the man whom Belle would eventually marry, and she was interested in him on that account. She swept the rag doll off her lap into the bottom of the punt with a hasty movement—ashamed of having been caught nursing it—and pulled her hat straight. There was something in Mr. Ingram's eyes that seemed to penetrate and scrutinize alarmingly,—even with the width of half the lake between them.

He came down to the edge of the bank, and she, rising and standing in the middle of the punt, held out her hand to him. He took it and held it for a moment, looking into her face curiously.

"You seem to have quite a menagerie here," said the squire, as the jackdaw jumped off her shoulder with an irritable cry. "What are you all supposed to be doing? Have you been singing them a farewell dirge, eh?"

She looked down on all her pets with a wistful expression.

"How I wish they were all coming with us to-morrow!" she exclaimed.

"So they shall, every man-jack of them, if you wish it. We'll take the whole crew and welcome."

"But they wouldn't like it," she said, shaking her head. "No, I am afraid they must stay behind."

She sighed, and the squire, planting one of his legs in the punt and keeping the other firmly on land, took her by the chin and turned up her face for inspection.

"Tears, my sweetheart? What do they mean?"

"Nothing," she replied, and she wrenched her chin out of his detaining grasp with a movement not altogether devoid of defiance.

"But you *have* been crying. Why?"

She hesitated a moment, and then, with her head still turned away, said in a low voice, "Only because I am going away from them all."

"But, my pretty one, we shall have them down at Rodney as soon as ever we get back."

"Oh, I know, but—it will be different."

To hide the trembling of her lips she took the jackdaw on to her finger, and smoothed his glossy wing against her mouth. "Get out!" cried the bird, hoarsely.

"There!" she exclaimed, looking up at Ingram, and he fancied there were more unshed tears about her eyes. "He always says that. Once, late in the evening, I came to his cage, and I heard him fluttering about and saying 'get out' in a very sleepy voice, and when I looked in I saw a mouse eating up his food. Wasn't it clever of him?"

"Very," said Ingram, rather at random, for, to tell the truth, he had not listened to the story. He was filled with an overwhelming astonishment—astonishment at the audacity of the deed which should make this child the wife of an old man to-morrow. He had known women of the world, having lived but eighteen years, who would not have hesitated a moment to sell themselves for a million of money to any one who chose to offer the bargain, but that this little girl, with her hat at the back of her head and the tears and her queer pets, should be sacrificed in a way she evi-

dently did not understand was a calamity. Man of the world as he was, and accustomed to every form of social barbarism, it would scarcely have seemed unnatural to him if the skies had fallen to avert the catastrophe.

The squire, meanwhile, cleared the punt in a wholesale manner, and when he came to the rag doll, his face broadened into a wide smile.

"What's to be done with this young lady?" he said, picking it up with the tips of his fingers, and holding it out to ridicule.

But Luigia's face flushed with a mingling of shame and anger, and Ingram did not dare to smile. She took it with a proud gesture.

"You may think she looks horrid," she said, "but that is nothing to me; and *I* should never laugh at anything *you* cared for." And, turning her back, she walked off with an air of offended dignity.

The anxious and thoroughly penitent squire followed in silence, carrying the silver-furred rabbits by their ears.

Later in the day Ingram had a little conversation alone with Luigia. They were on the lawn under the trees, and she was leaning against the hammock in which Belle had been lying before she went indoors.

"I wonder," he was saying, "why I never came here before, considering the number of times I have been to Friarsgate. It was very stupid of me." And he looked at her.

"Yes," she said simply, "it is a pretty place."

"Oh, it is more than pretty," he returned, and he still looked at her.

"And I am going away from it," she said, looking round her absently; then, suddenly lifting her eyes to his face, "I am going to be married to-morrow."

He looked down into her eyes, which were the eyes of a child, and did not fall beneath his gaze.

"Yes, I know," he said gravely.

A pause followed, during which she gazed away into the distance thoughtfully, and he looked at her.

"Marriage is a serious thing," he observed presently,

folding his arms and leaning against the trunk of the tree.

"Yes, very," she replied, equally gravely, turning up the face of a daisy with her toe.

"But do you realize what it means?"

"Oh yes."

"What?"

"That I am going to live all my life with Mr. Rodney, and that he will give me all my clothes."

"Is that *all*?"

"Oh no. I shall do just as I like, and have horses and dogs of my own, and go out to dinner-parties and pay calls, and"—looking down on the daisy she was tormenting—"I shall nurse him if he is ill, and do everything I can think of to make him happy and comfortable."

"Yes," said Ingram, with an involuntary smile, "it means all that, but it means a great deal more, too. Where is the *love* to come in, in this marriage of yours?"

Never in his life before, perhaps, had he spoken so seriously on the subject of marriage. He was wont to say that it meant but an arrangement of mutual convenience between two people, a social union that left them nearly as much freedom as they had before. As for love—that had little to do with the matter. It was not possible for a man to be madly in love with the woman who sat every morning of her life at his breakfast table—love requiring a certain glamor of romance around its object to keep it alive. And the woman—well, she was satisfied with the spending of her husband's money and the freedom of action that came with her position. He had no illusions left as to the marriage state, no yellow-backed novel conceptions of eternal love, no desire to find a kindred spirit, no high-flown faith in human nature. He knew life as it was, and expected nothing better. But for once, as Luigia looked at him with her beautiful, innocent eyes, and he knew she was running her head into a noose that could never be untied, and taking upon herself responsibilities she did not understand, an honest indignation rose within him. It was treachery to take advantage of her ignorance—a base un-

manly act—and even he, with all his callous worldliness, would have hesitated before such a deed.

"As for love," said Luigia, with a scornful little movement of her mouth, "I shall take care to avoid it—at least, the sort of love one reads of in novels. I can be hard if I like—and not love. I have done it before. It is the only way not to be miserable."

"What do *you* know about love, pray?"

"Something. I have cared for somebody who never has cared and never will care for me."

"Who? A man? A man you wanted to marry?"

"Oh dear, no." Her lips curled more scornfully than before. "It was nothing to do with marriage. It was some one belonging to me—in my own family—that is all."

"Indeed! How original—how charming! And so you think, because you have managed to subdue this unrequited affection for a father or an uncle, that it will be the same with a lover? My dear child, you are most fearfully and wonderfully *young!*"

He moved away from the tree, and came and stood in front of her—directly in front, so that she could not get away. When he spoke there was no longer the slightly scoffing tone in his voice that generally ran through it.

"Listen to me. You are a child, and I am a man of the world, and I know many things you do not. I know this—that beyond all shadow of doubt you will live to regret this marriage."

She looked up at him a little frightened. He spoke impressively, and it seemed to her it was the prophetic voice of Fate that was warning her.

"Some day," he went on, "there will come a man—a man you could love, and who loves you—and it will be all over with you. You will find yourself imprisoned, and the end of the story, whatever it may be, will be misery. Listen to me. Do as I tell you, for I *know*. Break off this marriage while there is yet time, and wait till you know what you are about."

"If that man came," she said, looking startled, "I should not listen to him. I should send him away."

"And suppose he would not go? Suppose he would be heard?"

"A gentleman always does what a lady wishes."

"Not when he is madly in love."

He was planted directly before her, and she was looking up at him with a fascinated gaze. Her lips parted, but she did not speak.

"I tell you," he went on, "that you will be able to do nothing with him when he comes. You and your little wishes will be light as air." He snapped his fingers. "You may tell him to go, but he will stay. You may refuse to listen, but he will speak. A man in love is beyond his own control, and far and away beyond yours. He will frighten you, no doubt, but what of that? You will get used to him, and, if you love him, love casts out fear."

As he spoke, a glimmering of some unknown power, before which she would be helpless, forced itself into her mind. Her emotional nature was stirred, her dark eyes deepened with a fascinated fear. But suddenly he laughed and turned aside.

"What in the name of mischief possesses me? To think that *I* should preach sentiment!—*I*, who have not a rag of it left, and believe in it no more than I believe in fairies, and all the rest of the pretty delusions! Run away, little girl, and know that there is not a word of truth in what I have been saying."

But he was really indignant that such a monstrosity in the way of marriages should be allowed, and uttered his indignation so strongly in the privacy of Lady Adelaide's boudoir that she was quite astonished.

"My dear Jean, you speak as though she were being forced into some horrible thing against her will. It is entirely her own doing, I assure you. No one influenced her in any way."

"That may be, but she is too much of a child to know her own mind."

"She is not such a child as you imagine. She has a pretty strong will of her own, as I have found to my cost

several times. Besides, she is devoted to the squire, and he to her."

"Devoted! He is old enough to be her grandfather twice over."

"You are speaking in exaggeration, my dear Jean. He is only just sixty."

"Sixty or six hundred, it is all the same thing," cried her nephew, much perturbed, wandering restlessly about the room. "The marriage is a monstrosity, and some one ought to put a stop to it."

"That would be quite impossible. Besides, there is no reason. I have known several similar marriages turn out remarkably well. She is really very fond of him."

"Is she? I doubt it. And even if she thinks she is now, she will find out her mistake before long."

He left the room too indignant to make himself agreeable, and wondering what on earth everybody could be about to allow such a marriage to take place in a civilized country, without lifting a finger to oppose it.

But the only person who had any real authority in the matter was silent. If he had spoken he could have put a stop to the rash proceeding, for a father's voice is not to be lightly set aside. But he was silent, and let things go their way.

In the evening, as Luigia was passing the open door of his smoking-room, he called her in. He put a small jewel-case into her hands, saying hurriedly—

"I hope you will like it. I know you have everything, but your mother seemed to think it might be useful."

She opened it with trembling fingers, and disclosed a slender gold bracelet, set with diamonds. They flashed and sparkled in the half light that came into the room from the hall, and she knew that they must have cost a large sum of money. Indeed, the thing was quite the best of its kind that Daubigny could procure.

She looked at it in silence, and a storm of conflicting feelings battled within her. It was beautiful, but it was not what she wanted. One kiss would have been worth a thousand of such trifles. She laid it on the table.

"Thank you," she said coldly. "But I would rather not have it."

"Don't you like it? I can change it for something else."

"Oh, yes, I like it," raising her head proudly, and looking him straight in the eyes, "but Belle cares about these things more than I do. You can give it to her." And before he had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to stop her, she had left the room.

He carried it to the light, and examined it anxiously, wondering what it was that was not to her taste. She had refused it for no reason apparently. It was mysterious, but he was not angry with her. Her luminous eyes, her caprice, her swift vanishing were all too like her mother for him to resent them in his heart, and he could not judge her calmly.

He did not give the bracelet to Belle; he put it away in the secret drawer of his desk, and there it remained for years. When it again saw the light, Daubigny's eyes were dim with tears, and his sigh was a heavy one as he looked down on it, bitterly regretting the irreparable past.

The next day the ceremony took place, and everything went off well. The squire was resplendent in a white waistcoat, with a picotee in his button-hole. He was in the highest possible spirits, and tipped everybody on the premises with or without reason. Only one shadow dimmed the brightness of the day for him, and that was when, at an unfashionably early hour he demanded a glimpse of his bride, he was told that such requests were never granted, and that he must control his impatience until he joined her at the altar. Besides, Luigia happened to be sobbing in Mrs. Harburton's arms at that moment, and was not fit to make her appearance.

"Crying? What for?" demanded the squire, with a sudden clouding of his radiant face.

"Nothing, merely excitement, which is quite natural," was the answer, and with that he had to be content.

When he saw her coming up the church on her father's arm, with her long white skirts sweeping behind her, and the orange-blossom in her dark hair, he was of opinion that

her tears had in no way spoiled her appearance, and that she had never looked so lovely. But there were others who declared the poor child was pale as death, and had more the air of going to her funeral than her marriage. But, if this were the case, it was not much to be wondered at. The hushed stillness of the expectant crowd in the church, the staring of many eyes, the mysterious ceremony, the weight of the unknown future that lay before her, the swelling music, the flower-decked altar—all combined to almost overwhelm her. What wonder if she were pale, and dared not lift her eyes? What wonder if her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely frame her responses? What wonder if her hand was cold and trembling when her husband took it to place upon it the plain gold ring of wifehood? She saw nothing, and knew nothing, till they were safely out of the church, and he had taken her into his arms on their homeward drive, and was kissing her back into life.

But she was completely dazed and bewildered all through the hour and a half that lay between the ceremony and the going away. She sat twisting the new ring round and round her finger, and wondering what she had done. And it was a relief to more than herself when the time arrived for the newly married couple to set off on their travels. Jean Ingram persisted in viewing the whole affair as a monstrosity, and Luigia as a sort of victim, in spite of Lady Adelaide's arguments to the contrary.

The last he saw of her was as the carriage drove off—pale, smiling, trembling, looking back through the shower of rice and flowers that was being flung at her, with the Skye terrier clasped tightly in her arms. The rabbits, kitten, and jackdaw had all been left behind on account of their objection to foreign travel, but the rag doll was safely packed into one of the big trunks, between two of the prettiest dresses in the trousseau.

Had Ingram known of this fact, he would have said more emphatically than ever that Luigia was a baby—more fit for the nursery than for marriage.

"Why do you care?" said Belle, noticing the expression on his face as the carriage drove away.

He shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"It is an instinct," he replied. "I still have instincts, strange to say. The other day, when I saw a man brutally kicking a horse, I knocked him down. That was an instinct. I object to seeing a helpless creature caught in a trap—that is again an instinct. I object to this marriage on the same principle—instinctively, and for no particular reason."

CHAPTER XII.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

It was nearly three years after Luigia's marriage that one morning Lady Adelaide and her daughter sat together in the boudoir of Daubigny's London house. Lady Adelaide was seated at her embroidery frame, engaged with an elaborate piece of church work. Her daughter held an open letter in her hand.

"It is from the squire," she said, looking up as she finished reading it. "He wants me to go down to Rodney and stay with Luigia. He thinks she may find it dull after all the excitement of their travels. For my part, I should be bored to death stagnating in a dull country place like that!"

"Still, it would be very different going on a visit," said Lady Adelaide, thoughtfully. "There are some good families living in that part of the world. Sir Ralph Bowden has a place he bought there lately, and the Harburtons live at Rodney, too. I think you might manage to enjoy yourself."

Belle threw the letter aside with a little frown.

"I want a change of some sort badly. I am tired of society and the eternal round. Perhaps a month or two in the country wouldn't be a bad thing."

She rose and walked over to the window, where she stood idly playing with the tassel of the blind-cord.

"I suppose Jean would have no objection?" suggested her mother.

"Jean? I should pay no attention to him if he had! I do not make his wishes my law. Beside—he is not likely to object."

"He has not been very satisfactory lately."

"He never was. I cannot imagine why I ever accepted him." She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "Sometimes I really think it would be better to put an end to it. What is the good of dragging on like this without any prospect of marriage? I am tired of it."

"Certainly," returned her mother. "I think you have every right to break off your engagement since his expectations have fallen to the ground. I told you so at the time, only you would not listen to me."

"It looked so bad to throw a man over because his uncle married again. People would have called it heartless. But, now that Lord Cranburn has a son, and Jean's prospects are nothing whatever in that direction, I really do think I should be justified in breaking it off. No one wants to marry a man with a bare five-hundred a year. I am, indeed, most unfortunate!"

During the past three years Belle's affairs had been highly unsatisfactory. In a moment of pique with Ingram she had accepted the son of a very rich brewer, and had regretted it that self-same hour. At the end of two months, however, the young man most obligingly died, thus releasing her from an unpleasant connection without giving her the trouble of moving in the matter. She went into mourning, of course, but since, on second thoughts, it seemed wiser to ignore the little episode as far as possible—brewer's sons being by no means creditable, viewed in the light of affianced husbands—it was not long before the pale grey and lavender gowns were "piped with canary," or "ruched with scarlet," and breweries were a forbidden subject in her hearing. After a decent interval her cousin, Jean Ingram, came forward and proposed for her hand with all due formality. She accepted him, not only because she liked him, but because Lord Cranburn was lying at death's door at the time, and there seemed a prospect of immediate succession to the title and estate. Contrary to expectation, however, his lord-

ship rose from his bed of sickness like a giant refreshed, married the woman who had nursed him through it, and took a new lease of life. Belle was furious, and Ingram, smiling, offered to release her; but she refused this offer. Before the year was out a son was born to the old man, and Ingram saw his future crumble into thin air. He bore the blow with the calmness of philosophy, but Belle could not altogether hide the depth of her disappointment. She was irritable, discontented, undecided what to do, and in a dozen different minds a day—the only fact quite clear to her being the perverse and contemptible folly of old men marrying when they ought to be in their graves. Ingram laughed at her, snapped his fingers at his ill-fortune, and devoted himself to his profession with new and real energy for the first time. They had been engaged a year, and were no nearer marriage than at first, so it seemed. His name was becoming known, but his pockets were empty, and Belle, however much she liked a man, had no intention of enduring poverty for his sake.

"Don't be too hasty, my dear," said Lady Adelaide, soothingly, after a pause. "Why not go down to Rodney for the summer, and think it quietly over? Luigia would be delighted, and, who knows, perhaps you may meet some one there who is far more suitable than poor Jean. I have known those country places do wonders sometimes. There was Lady Lea's daughter, a plain, dowdy girl, who went through three London seasons without an offer, and one summer she went to stay with a maiden aunt, buried alive in a moated grange somewhere in the Fen district—a most melancholy spot—and before three weeks had passed she was engaged to the Marquis of Melfort, who was just recovering from an accident in the hunting field. She took him grapes and flowers, and drove him about the lanes in her aunt's pony-carriage, and he made love to her from sheer *ennui*. There wasn't another girl in the place, I believe."

Belle did not smile at her mother's remarks; they were somewhat in accordance with her own views.

"If I were only free," she said, "I might make a much better match. And yet——"

She paused, looking out into the sunny, dusty London square with an irresolute expression. The truth was that she loved this man—loved him as far as her nature was capable of loving disinterestedly, and in spite of his unlimited capacity for aggravating her. His very coldness piqued and provoked her, and she would have given a good deal to rouse in him the fires of jealousy or passion. She had tried him in a hundred different ways; she had coquetted with other men; she had professed indifference herself, she had exercised all her arts and wiles without effect. He showed no animosity towards the men she flirted with, or signs of consternation when she quarrelled with him; he got her tickets for the opera, and handsome bouquets when she went to balls; he complimented her on her new dresses sometimes, and attended her on most occasions when she demanded his company. But it all came to nothing; and they only looked forward to marriage as an event for the remote future. Miss Carmichael chafed under the delay. Whatever she might say to the world in general, she owned to herself in private that it would be far more satisfactory to marry at once, and to secure a man who could give her a good position. Still, it would be foolish to throw Jean over until she was pretty sure of something better, and at present there was no specially eligible bachelor on the *tapis*.

The result of these reflections was that she resolved to accept the squire's invitation, and go down to Rodney for some months. As her mother suggested, it might be easier to secure a really good *parti* in the depths of the country, where the established country families were rusticating in their dull old houses, than in the crush of a London season, where the competition is more severe. At any rate, she could go and see what Fate brought her.

Half an hour later the culprit, Jean Ingram, dropped in. He found Belle busily employed at her secretaire.

"I am writing to the dear old squire," she said, as she shook hands with him. "He wants me to go down to Rodney for the summer, to be with Luigia, who finds it frightfully dull after their travels. It must, indeed, be tame work settling down as a farmer's wife after racing all over the

world as they have been doing. I quite sympathize with the poor girl!"

"I think it was most unwise of the squire to take her about so much at first," put in Lady Adelaide. "It must have been completely wasted on an ignorant child like Luigia, and would only tend to make her extravagant, and restless and discontented with her home. No wonder she finds Rodney dull after Paris and Rome and Athens, and all the other places he has taken her to."

"He was so absurdly in love," said Belle, "that he couldn't refuse her anything she chose to ask. She asked to wander about the world and spend his money, and, of course, he was incapable of saying 'no.' But I dare say he has got over his infatuation by this time, though, no doubt, Luigia is completely spoilt."

"No doubt, poor child! And now that at last they have settled down together in a dull, humdrum way for the rest of their lives, he is finding out his mistake. She is crying her eyes out with *ennui*, and begging him to take her away again, and a fine state his crops will be in if he listens to her!"

Lady Adelaide half closed her eyes to observe the effect of the white silk doves and pale lilies she was working, and, finding them all that could be desired, proceeded to criticise the ways of her neighbours still further.

"The fact of the matter is that the poor old squire lost his head like a foolish boy of nineteen, and made a great mistake—a most irreparable mistake—in marrying Luigia. It was an absurd marriage—I said so at the time, but nobody would listen to me. She was an absolute child, only half educated, utterly unfitted for anything but the discipline of the schoolroom for another two years. Instead of that she is brought forward, spoilt, worshipped, indulged in every possible way, taken about all over the Continent, in a useless, extravagant fashion. What is the result? At the age of twenty, when he brings her home, and expects her to settle down, she turns out an unmanageable, selfish, wilful creature, whose one idea is to amuse herself. I could have predicted it from the first!"

"Is she very much altered since her marriage?" inquired Ingram, who had not yet been allowed to speak. He had listened to the tirade from the two ladies with a slight smile of amusement.

"Oh, well, I have not seen her, you know," admitted Lady Adelaide, who had been drawing entirely fancy pictures of Luigia's development. "They were abroad until last autumn, and then we wintered in Spa, and so really we have never had an opportunity of going down to Rodney. We have only been back six weeks, you know. But it is evidently as I say. The poor squire writes imploringly to Belle, begging her to go down as a sort of companion to Luigia, who is moping herself to death because she finds country life so dull."

"Luigia always was an unmanageable sort of person," said Belle, "although her quiet manner was apt to deceive people. It will be rather amusing to see what she has developed into since her marriage."

She turned to her letter again and wrote a few lines without interruption.

"It will do you a world of good!" said Ingram, who was lazily regarding her. "You can tuck up your petticoats and make hay, and get up at five to milk the cows."

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing! I never could see the fascination of hay-making myself—a foolish running about with whisps of prickly grass to thrust down one another's necks!"

"At any rate, it has the advantage of being a healthy occupation."

"But it freckles a fair skin most unmercifully," put in Lady Adelaide. "I should be very sorry to see Belle expose herself to the sun of an open hayfield."

"What is the objection?" inquired Ingram, elevating his eyebrows.

"Why, I should become a mass of freckles, and a perfect fright!" cried Belle, dipping her pen afresh.

"Impossible, *ma chère*. Besides, freckles are adorable!"

"What nonsense, Jean! You know you detest them.

It was only the other day you complained of Emily Murton's complexion and said she bored you to death."

"Very probably. But I don't suppose it was the freckles that bored me. Of all things in the world I love a rustic beauty."

"You say so merely to annoy me, but if I really did allow my face to burn, you would be the very first to complain. You are quite the most fastidious person I ever came across."

"That may be, but it does not follow that I hold the generally accepted opinions. I can adore freckles, and yet be difficult to please in other matters."

"I don't believe you adore them," returned Belle, dipping her pen for the third time, with a shade of annoyance on her face; "and you know as well as I do that they are intensely vulgar."

He laughed, highly delighted with this conclusive argument; and Lady Adelaide, seeing the cloud on her daughter's brow, hastened to the rescue.

"Come," she said, smiling leniently at Ingram, "it is no good wasting time in wrangling. You have an immense deal to do, Belle, if you mean to go on this visit, and had better see your dressmaker at once. Write your letter of acceptance, and perhaps Jean will take you down to Mount Street."

"No doubt Jean has important engagements of his own," returned her daughter, coldly.

"Nothing in the world. I am entirely at your service, devoted hand and foot, your abject slave. Shall I come and help you choose your haymaking gowns?"

"You may come to the dressmaker's and see the stuffs, if you like," she said, rather gratified. "It is as well to choose something you like, as you leave me no peace if I am not dressed to your taste."

"Oh, my dear girl, it is not *my* taste that has to be consulted. I am already attached to your chariot wheels. It is all the rustic swains down at Rodney that you must captivate. Something flashy is probably in their line; they have, no doubt, been surfeited with sprigged muslins and garden hats."

Belle folded her letter in silence, and he watched her with a smile of amusement in his eyes. How well he knew her, and how little she understood him! She had made up her mind to do mischief among the simple, country folk at Rodney, and he was well aware of the fact. He laughed to himself at the idea; it amused and did not in the least displease him.

"This visit of mine is to be an entire surprise to Luigia," she said, as she rose, letter in hand. "The squire wants me to come upon her without warning. It will be rather amusing to see her in her own home."

"Hardly amusing, I should say," ejaculated Lady Adelaide. "I expect she is a very shiftless, extravagant housekeeper. But perhaps the squire has some one to manage for her. He would hardly leave everything to that child."

"My dear mother, he is foolish enough to do anything—dear old man!" laughed Belle as she left the room.

When she returned, Ingram was waiting for her alone, with his hands in his pockets, standing in the sunny window. He turned round to survey her in his half-cynical, half-amused way as she entered.

"Well?" she said inquiringly, meeting his look with complacency, since she knew she was irreproachably attired. "Am I satisfactory?"

"As a fashion-plate you are perfect!" he replied; "but for the rustics I should suggest a trifle more colour. Their taste is uneducated, you must remember, and they have probably a savage love of ornament. Try the effect of red feathers, or something of that sort. Glass beads have gone out some centuries back, but——"

"I suppose you think my costume hideous—as usual!" she broke in, buttoning her glove with violence.

"*Ma chère*," he replied imperturbably, "you are admirably turned out as a fashionable woman, but, as I have told you many times, I do not admire fashionable women."

"Oh, no, of course not. You like immense waists, and flat heels, and hair parted in the middle—I know the style!

But if I dressed according to your taste I should be hooted about the streets as a lunatic."

"You misjudge me," he returned with a wave of the hand. "I have no partiality for affectation. All I ask is simplicity."

"Oh, you men talk a great deal about simplicity, but if you come across it it bores you to death, and you get away from it as fast as you can. If the truth were owned, you really in your hearts infinitely prefer a fashionable, stylish woman."

"A fashionable woman is certainly amusing," he replied gravely, as they emerged into the sunny street and he opened her parasol for her; "and after all, amusement—or rather the absence of boredom—is the great thing to aim at. So no doubt you are right, as usual."

The warmth of the May sunshine was about them, glorifying everything as they strolled together through the London Park, but in spite of the fact that he was devoting his time and attention to her, and was lavish in the spending of money he could ill afford, she was not happy or contented.

She was beginning to realize that, beautiful and charming as she might be deemed by the world in general, she had not the power of making this one man admire her. He liked her, of course, as much as he could ever like anything in his cynicism, but she did not understand him and she could not make him happy.

She knew this in her heart, and chafed under the knowledge, and was powerless to alter it. Time alone could bring them together, or it would drift them still further apart.

And she scarcely knew which of the alternatives she wished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WOODS.

The station was a little wooden wayside building, with a wire railing to keep the cattle from straying on the lines. On both sides stretched miles of sandy heath, dark with gorse and plantations of fir. The only colour in the landscape was the white winding road and the sprinkling of yellow over the gorse bushes. There was the smell of pines in the air, and a heavenly, radiant sunshine to warm the body and cheer the heart of man.

The squire, in drab gaiters and baggy knee-breeches, looking just the same as ever, was waiting on the platform for the London express. There was a rose in his buttonhole and a couple of setters at his heels. He welcomed Belle with his usual genial heartiness, and grasped Ingram warmly by the hand.

"Delighted to see you!" he cried to the latter. "Glad you could spare the time! I thought you were one of those busy chaps who never have a moment to enjoy themselves; but now you're here——"

"I only came down to look after Belle," said Ingram, a trifle off-hand in his manner, "and I return to London by the next train."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! Couldn't hear of such a thing for a moment! You must come out to Rodney and sleep the night, at any rate. We'll talk about the trains back to town to-morrow. There's no such desperate hurry as all that."

"There's a meeting at the College of Surgeons——" he began; but the squire refused to listen, and, linking his arm in his, led him through the station building to the road outside, where the Manor dog-cart was waiting for them.

It certainly seemed wicked to turn one's back on the lovely smiling country and return to town, with its squalor, dust, and vulgar noise. Ingram stood at the roadside in

the hot sunshine and considered the question. He had honestly intended to go back by the next up-train, but the squire's determined hospitality and the view and the smell of the pines were too much for him. He wavered, and was lost. He got into the dog-cart when the squire bade him do so, and in another moment the three were driving rapidly along the white road, and the wooden station and the cows were becoming small behind them.

"You've a four-mile drive before you," cried the squire, flipping the back of his fat mare with his whip, "and we shan't be in for tea, I'm afraid. How surprised Luigia will be when you both walk in upon her! I haven't dropped the faintest hint. I told her I was driving in to Woodleigh about a ploughshare, and may Heaven forgive me the white lie! It was in a good cause."

"How is Luigia?" asked Belle. "Is she getting fat and rosy in this country air of yours?"

The squire laughed and shook his head. "She's every inch of her a country squire's wife," he said, "and there's no end to the interest she takes in the land and the crops and the cattle and all the rest of it; but I can't truthfully say that she's fat and rosy. She'll never *look* the farmer's wife, though she's heart and soul in the business. She comes round with me every morning of her life, even to the outlying fields, and makes her suggestions for all the world as if she'd been born and bred to it. And very pretty and impracticable some of 'em are too!"

His face beamed as he said this, and it was easy to see that Luigia was the pride of his heart still, as in the days of his courtship of her.

"What's she like now?" inquired Belle. "Has she altered much since her marriage? You must remember I haven't seen her for nearly three years."

"Not altered a bit—at least, if she has, I don't see it. Her face never changes for me. When she's fifty or sixty I dare say I shan't find out that she's grown old."

That was likely enough, since gentlemen of a hundred and three are not, as a rule, close observers; but though both his companions realized the immense difference in age be-

tween him and his wife, the squire himself had long ago forgotten all about it.

"Does she find country life dull?" asked Belle, presently.

"Bless you, no! She enjoys it all as much I do, who was born and bred on the soil. She's for ever ransacking the woods for wild flowers, and filling the house with them, and she has endless broods of chickens and ducklings and pigeons that she attends to herself, and a regular menagerie at the back, where she keeps her rabbits and squirrels and puppies. I never interfere with her little hobbies. I told her from the first she should do as she liked, and she does—even to bringing a number of dirty babies into the house and making them sticky with bread-and-jam, and giving their mothers a better dinner than we have ourselves. And she spoils and pampers my tenants till they're ready to kiss the very ground she walks on. Oh, no, I never interfere with her."

"What a discontented, insolent crew your tenants must be!" remarked Ingram from the back.

"What do you mean?" cried the squire, turning round indignantly.

"Oh, merely that I imagined they would take advantage of such treatment. We all do, you know."

"Well, perhaps you are right," he replied with a broad laugh. "They know they can get whatever they want out of me through her. They bring her piteous tales, which she repeats to me, and before I know where I am, I have made all sorts of rash promises and am a lost man. It's not a paying concern—a tender-hearted, credulous wife, I can assure you."

"Most expensive, I should say. A mania for dress must be nothing to it."

"Why," continued the squire, "when I take her the round of the cottages it's quite ridiculous to see the way she gets imposed upon. The number of new chimneys and coppers and ovens and gates that are needed when she is with me is astonishing—perfectly astonishing! And she looks so eager and pathetic about it all—for all the world

as though it were her own stove, and gate, and chimney—that what is a man to do? I am weak and helpless as an infant before her, and lose money right and left. But I don't grudge it—I don't grudge it;" and his smile sobered into a very tender expression as he shook his head.

"She's the right sort of lassie!" he ejaculated after a pause, during which Belle cogitated over this new view of Luigia. "She's not above plain hard work if there's a push, too. I've known her, when it looked like rain, tuck up her sleeves and go down with me to the hayfields and work there all day as steadily as any of 'em, and laugh in my face when I suggested her getting tired. She's no grand lady when there's an honest day's work to be done, I can tell you."

"So she has developed into a regular farmer's wife?" observed Belle, after a second pause, during which she found it necessary to banish at a sweep the imaginary pictures she and her mother had been constructing of Luigia. "I should not have imagined it, somehow. And she has dropped her music, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it! She sings and plays to me in the evenings, while I read the *Agricultural Gazette*, and very prettily she does it—better than ever, in my opinion; but, then, I'm not a fair judge. She always was a sort of Lorelei for me."

"Oh, I know her voice completely charmed you," said Belle, with a little inflexion of jealousy in her own. "Her style is very Italian and emotional."

The squire made no reply, and they drove on in silence. The mare's fast-trotting feet on the hard road, and the bleating of the sheep in the distance, were the only sounds to be heard for miles.

The road had left the country of heath and fir, and struck through the hills into a watered and cultivated valley. Far and wide on both sides stretched the hills in a sunny silence, with the sheep feeding on their green slopes, or lying, hot and still, in the shadow of the stone walls. A stream, lined with pollard willows and marigolds, watered the meadows of the valley, and knee-deep in the grass among the butter-

cups and daisies stood the gentle cows, flicking the flies away with their tails and scenting the air with the fragrance of their breath. Here and there lay a village clustered round its church, with its white walls and thatched roofs half hidden in the trees, and behind on the hills, a lonely farmhouse with its haystacks and outbuildings gathered snugly around it, and its western windows ablaze like beacons with the fierce red light of the sinking sun. The only wayfarers to be met on the road were the carters in their blue jackets at the head of their horses, or a herd of cows driven home to milk. The hedges were full of flowering May and budding roses, and the tangled grass at the roadside was white with dust, for there had been no rain for weeks.

It was the land of peace and plenty, of rustic ignorance, of old-fashioned virtues, of plodding simplicity, perhaps even of contentment. Ingram, as he looked into the scorched and weather-beaten faces of the ploughmen, and around him at the far-stretching hills in their peace and their silence, felt that this was indeed a different world to the one he had hitherto known.

"This is the old coach-road built by the Romans, you know," said the squire. "It's haunted at midnight by a coach and four driven by a headless lady—and a rattling good pace she goes, too, I can tell you! As the church clock strikes twelve, splash they all go into the river—there, at that bend in the road;" and he pointed ahead of him with his whip. "It's twenty feet deep there, or more."

"You don't believe the story?" said Belle, smiling.

"Believe it? Of course I do! I'd swear to it as sure as my name's Thomas Rodney. There isn't a man in the village who wouldn't do the same."

"But have you ever seen it?"

"Not I. But there's half a dozen who have. Besides, it's a true story. There was a coach loaded with passengers all drowned there a hundred and fifty years ago. They dragged the river and found the skeletons—horses and all. Our blacksmith's got the horses' hoofs nailed up in his forge, to keep off the Evil One, to this very day. You can go and see 'em when you like. Oh, the story's true enough!"

"What delightful simplicity!" reflected Ingram to himself at the back. "How refreshing—how wonderfully refreshing it is! and how far better worth having than all the wisdom of the modern world! What would I not give to believe in that phantom coach and headless lady!"

"We're nearly there," said the squire. "This is Rodney village. And now for a sight of Luigia's face when she sees you both instead of the ploughshare! But she'll never forgive me for telling a lie, bless her!"

They were passing through a straggling village street with white-washed cottages, a red-tiled school-house, and a bow-windowed inn. Sheepdogs and children swarmed in the neighbourhood, and women in sun-bonnets stood in their doorways and curtsied to their squire as he drove past.

The village street ended in a winding country road again, where the sun flickered hotly through the network of leaves, and the hedges were full of ragged robins and white May. They drove past the lodge of Major Harburton's house, with its long avenue of lime-trees now nearly dressed in the pale green of spring; past Miss Pettigrew's queer mill-house astride the river; past the Vicarage, with its shady lawns and spreading elms, and on again where an irregular red-brick wall, with masses of ivy bulging over the top, screened the dwelling within from view.

"Here we are!" cried the squire, flourishing his whip as they drove up a broad gravel path between wire railings. "This is the Manor House, and now for Luigia's face!"

But Luigia was nowhere to be seen. The house-door stood wide open, giving a glimpse into a cool and shady hall, but no Luigia ran out to welcome the sound of wheels. The gardens around were gay with flowers and sunshine, but no Luigia came over the grass, with eyes full of surprise, to greet her visitors. The maidservant said that her mistress was out—gone to tea at Mrs. Harburton's, she believed—and the squire's face clouded at this postponement of his delightful surprise.

"Never mind! We'll go straight on there and walk in upon the whole lot," he exclaimed, after a pause. "Perhaps

it'll be as good as anything, after all. Jump in again, Ingram. We'll drive round."

But Ingram was standing on the gravel path, and did not look in the least inclined to "jump in again" as he was bidden. He waved his hand towards the lawn, lying deep in shadow.

"Grass," he observed eloquently, "is something so new and rare to me that, if you have no objection, I will lie on it and smoke till you come back. I quite thirst to make its acquaintance."

"Don't imagine Dolly Harburton won't be delighted to see you," cried the squire, looking at him irresolutely. "She's my niece, you know, and she'll be delighted, quite delighted. I'll answer for her."

"Thanks. You are very good, but I can't give up the grass. Belle will make my apologies very prettily, and explain that I am a worn-out London man. Worn-out London men are always allowed to lie on their backs in the shade whatever is going on."

"Oh, well, do just as you like," cried the good-natured squire, climbing in again. "You're not tired, Belle? You'd like to go, wouldn't you?"

"Very much," replied that young lady, hastily touching up the little curls on her forehead with a view to the expected crowd of visitors in Mrs. Harburton's drawing-room.

"Make yourself at home," he cried, turning back to Ingram. "Ring for what you want, and do just as you like. We shan't be long;" and with a wave of the hand they were off.

"Jean is most incomprehensible," said Belle, as they drove out of the gate. "He pretends to hate society, and yet he goes out tremendously, and is the greatest favourite everywhere. But he always puts on an air of being dragged into things; I believe he does it just to enhance his value."

"No, no, my dear, you're too hard on him," replied the squire, soothingly. "He's a clever fellow, a tremendously clever fellow, and those brains of his are busy all day and all night, more or less, and I can quite understand his liking a quiet hour on the grass with his cigar. He'll lie and think

of you, you know, and be all the more delighted to have you back."

Belle had her doubts on this point, but she only said—

"I think it was distinctly rude of him to refuse to come with us, and I shall tell him so."

She turned her head to look back as she spoke, just in time to see him throw himself on the grass, with his face towards the house, on which the mellow afternoon sunshine was falling. She was annoyed with him that he preferred anything to her, even though, in this instance, the companion of his solitude was only an old bow-windowed house, with a thatched roof and lattice casements.

Left alone, Ingram threw himself on the grass, lighted a cigar, and fell into a day-dream.

He professed to despise artistic emotion of every sort; he analyzed the sentiment expressed in music, painting, and poetry, till it vanished before him and left him cold, unmoved, and contemptuous. His will was stronger than his senses, and his reason than his heart, and he intended that it should be so. He prided himself upon his incapacity to feel, believing it to be the only true philosophy, since all things end in dust and nothing is worth taking to heart. He had tested the world and found it vanity, and henceforth nothing could touch him to the quick. This he believed, and for some years nothing had happened to disturb the belief.

Yet there was something about that old Manor House, as he lay and looked at it, that roused in him a pulse of vague, romantic interest. It was so old, so stately, so lovely. Travelled man of the world as he was, his wanderings had been only in the beaten track, and whatever he had seen had been veiled by the influences of the hour. Ancient ruins, picturesque buildings, scenes of world-wide fame are inspiring in themselves, but seen in company with the fashionable world, they lose their meaning, their romantic charm, their poetic inspiration. Ingram had been content to visit the celebrated scenes of the world in company with fashion and frivolity, because nothing that his fellowmen had ever done seemed to him either interesting or praiseworthy.

There was no shrine at which he felt compelled to worship. But to-day, having gone into the byways and hedges, he had come across something that, with neither pretensions nor renown, claimed his admiration in spite of all his theories.

It was an old house, whitewashed and heavily beamed, with a thatched roof, lattice windows, and fantastic chimneys. It was smothered in old-fashioned creepers—wistaria, japonica, roses. Every window and every door stood wide open with friendly invitation; the bedroom curtains fluttered in the breeze; blue smoke curled peacefully upwards from the giant mouths of the chimneys; swallows flew in and out of the overhanging eaves, twittering, darting, and feeding their young.

It was essentially a home—a cosy, happy gathering place, full of sunshine in the summer and the warmth of great fires in the winter. Yet it was more than this—there was romance about it. Every nook and cranny and queer dark passage spoke of bygone days—of meetings and partings, deaths and births, sorrowings and rejoicings that had gone on there for hundreds of years. It had sheltered many a tale of love and suffering within its walls; the dim trace and the lurking echo of them lived there still. There were lover's whispers on the staircases, stolen kisses shut into the cupboards, a maiden's longing and despair peeping from the upper windows, where, sheltered in the curtain, she could look along the road to London. It spoke of all this and far more. Every ceiling, every wall, every window had its history written in the lives of those who had long since passed away, whose graves now lay beyond the seas in distant lands or in the churchyard near at hand, where the wind and rain of centuries had swept the record of their very names away.

It had seen and suffered much, the old house, but there was strength left in it still, and many a human heart might struggle and throb and fight out its destiny beneath that brown roof yet, and its rafters might live to ring again with the sound of children's voices, even unto the third and fourth generation after the present Squire of Rodney had gone to his rest.

The quaintness, the stillness, the old-world air were soothing in the extreme, and Ingram lay on the grass without moving, watching the butterflies hovering round the flowers and the blackbirds strutting on the lawn.

A far-away clock struck seven, and the sun was going down. He got up and made his way through the garden and the fields beyond, out towards the flaming west. There was a red glare in the sky behind the trees in the wood, and under their branches a dim, mysterious twilight was gathering fast! Anemones and wild hyacinths sprang into bloom through the damp, leafy mould, and moss and ivy wreathed the knotted trunks of the trees. A smell of fresh, damp earth filled the air, the gloom of the woods was fast deepening, and the birds were settling for the night. A strange foreboding of great events seemed to lurk in the shadows of the wild wood; the very air, with its fresh woodland smell, and deep, unbroken silence, was heavy with omen and mystic influences. Ingram followed the narrow path without knowing why he did so. Had he been an impressionable man he might have fallen a victim to the influences of the hour, and vaguely expected something unusual to happen. As it was he did neither.

Presently he saw a woman coming towards him along the silent, gloomy path. She wore a white dress, her head was bare, her hands were clasped behind her. She was singing to herself a low, melancholy little song. There were words to it, but he could not catch them, and softly and sadly they floated away through the trees and were lost. He drew back a little into the shadow of the underwood to watch her without being seen. She came on unconsciously, listlessly, with vague eyes. There were cowslips and wild hyacinths in a little bunch at her waist, and her hands were full of more woodland flowers. He could hear the words of her song now; it was the wild, sad refrain of the enchanted princess, in the legends of Ireland.

"Silent, oh Moyle, be the roar of thy water;
Break not, ye breezes, on Erin's lone isle,
While sadly and mournfully Lir's lonely daughter
Tells to the night-star her tale of woe."

She paused a moment to gather her nosegay together, looking down on the little wild flowers with an unconscious melancholy of expression that was not unsuited to the theme of her song. She was like some such pale unhappy spirit, doomed to wander at sundown in the shadowy woods to work out her melancholy spell. He came out of his place of concealment and waylaid her.

"So you did not go to Mrs. Harburton's tea-party, after all!" he remarked, as coolly as though they had parted but half an hour before.

She stopped abruptly, dropping some of her flowers; then the vagueness went out of her eyes, and they were flooded with a sudden light of recognition.

"Mr. Ingram!" she exclaimed. And then she laughed a little and held out her hand.

"So you remember me?" he said, looking into her face with his old curiosity. "What a memory you have! Have I lasted all these years—since the days when you wore a pinafore and nursed a doll? I feel greatly flattered."

"It is an eternity certainly," said Luigia, "but then you happened to make an impression on me, you see;" and she drew away her hand from his detaining grasp as she spoke.

"Did I? I am more flattered than ever—only that I can hardly bring myself to believe it."

"Oh, it is true." She stooped to pick up her fallen flowers, and he stooped too. "You gave me a lecture on marriage—a sort of warning. But do you know"—looking up at him as she took the anemones from his hand and added them to her bunch—"that I have not found it so very serious, after all."

"No? I am much relieved to hear it."

He planted himself before her on the narrow path and looked at her intently with undisguised curiosity and admiration. She had changed somewhat, was an inch or two taller than when he had last seen her, and her wonderful eyes had learned new ways for the beguiling of mankind. As he looked she lifted them heavily, languidly, and in them was a great softness, an impenetrable mystery, a depth beyond a depth, so it seemed, that no mortal man

could hope to fathom. Yet, in spite of their languor, they were very direct and steadfast in their gaze.

"How much longer are you going to look at me?" she said calmly and deliberately. "And has it never occurred to you that I might possibly object?"

"I beg your pardon—I apologize profoundly. But when a man meets a white spirit in the twilight of the woods, he must be forgiven if he forgets to treat her exactly as he would a woman in a London drawing-room."

"But I am not a spirit," she said, "and I prefer to be treated as an ordinary woman. Suppose you move a little and let me pass."

He turned aside, but he was laughing.

"I believe you *are* a spirit," he said—"a spirit of the woods and streams, or something equally unearthly. I believe you could throw spells over people and turn them into fauns and nymphs, or anything else you liked. You have almost bewitched me—hardened worldling that I am!"

He followed her along the narrow path till they came out into the clearer light at the end of the wood. She was talking—asking him about himself, about his journey, about Belle, Lady Adelaide, Daubigny—and before two minutes had passed she had discovered the squire's secret. She had a sweet, pathetic voice and slow, soft movements—a voice and manner so gentle that it was difficult to tell whether she was pleased or utterly indifferent to his news. "She needs to be known," he said to himself, as he followed her. "That manner may mean anything or nothing."

They passed from the wood into the open field, where the cowslips grew thickly and the grass was wet with dew. Twilight was fast falling, and he could not see much more of her than her white gown as they went along the field-path together. The dim outline of cows cropping grass could be seen through the dusk, and their sweet breath came to them as they passed.

She talked about every one and everything belonging to her childhood, and it seemed that she had forgotten none of her old friends and pets. Her voice was very sweet, and as

Ingram walked through the wet fields and felt the flutter of her skirts against his feet now and then, he began to wonder if he were really as devoid of all sensation as he had taught himself to believe.

On reaching the house they found that Belle and the squire had not yet returned from the Harburtons', and Luigia led the way into the drawing-room. It was a charming room, vague, shadowy, rambling, filled with the sweet, faint smell of dried rose-leaves and the fresher fragrance of growing hyacinths.

"We must wait for them, I suppose," she said, subsiding into a rocking-chair in the deep bay of the window. "Won't you sit down?" and she turned back to him carelessly.

He chose the window-seat, and sitting with his back to the light, folded his arms and looked at her. She was rocking herself gently with her hands on the arms of her chair and her head resting against the cushion at the back. It was a delicate little head, with silky black hair wound in coils, like a snake, on the crown of it. Not a hair was out of place. Her white dress and her eyes gleamed through the darkness, and the silence was only broken by the monotonous tap of her foot on the floor as she rocked.

"I had an idea," said Ingram, presently, "that you would be the same sort of shy child you were when I saw you last, though I had been told otherwise."

"I was never shy," said Luigia, rocking herself. "People always make that mistake. My eyes look startled and frightened and timid, so they tell me, but in reality I am frightened of nothing and no one."

She spoke in a low sweet voice, and looked out to the evening sky, gently rocking.

"But it is quite true," she added, after a pause, "that I am not the child you remember. I have changed my skin like the serpent."

"How is that?"

She was looking upwards, away to the western sky, and the last faint gleam of light was reflected in her eyes. They were great, brown, velvety eyes, deep as wells of quiet

water—so deep that were a reckless man to cast himself into their depths he might be lost for ever.

"How can I say?" she replied, with a rapid, fleeting smile. "One lives—that is enough! Italy, Egypt, Persia—they are experiences in themselves. We have travelled a great deal, you know."

"So I heard—among other things."

"Other things? What other things?" She looked at him inquiringly through the gloom.

"Oh, nothing of importance,—only that Luigia Rodney's eyes had learned new ways for the beguiling of mankind."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. That she was breaking hearts wherever she went, and was one of the most dangerous flirts in Europe."

"Dear me!"—looking at him with large, soft eyes full of wonder. "And Europe is such a *large* place!"

"Very large. But probably the man who told me was a victim himself, which would account for a little exaggeration."

"Probably. I wonder who he was. I might possibly remember his name."

"Not likely. It was a very ordinary one—and he wasn't pretty. I dare say he passed unnoticed in the herd."

"Oh, well," protested Luigia, "it is, of course, a little difficult to remember all the Smiths and Browns one comes across in three years' travelling."

"But I suppose they do very well at the time—just to keep your hand in for the bigger game?"

"Oh, they are better than nothing, yes."

A short silence, broken only by the rocking of Luigia's chair on the polished floor. Then she said—

"What else did you hear?"

"That a friend of yours—an Italian Count—shot himself in Rome last winter," replied Ingram, promptly.

"They often shoot themselves," she remarked coolly.

"It was said that he shot himself for your sake."

"Very probably. In Italy when a man kills himself they always attribute it to a woman."

"But was it true?"

"True? Whoever knows the truth? I have long ago given up asking for it."

In her evasion of his direct question he read the answer, and the admiration with which he regarded her was beginning to mingle with distrust. She was certainly fascinating in all her words and ways, but so is the flame to the moths that hover round it. That blundering creature, man, would probably fare no better than the moth if he went too near her.

She met his eyes with a slight smile.

"Italians are so passionate," she said. "They develop into madmen with very little provocation. One cannot judge them by the ordinary standard. I am half Italian myself and can understand them better than you can, perhaps."

"Did you reward your victim with pity?" said Ingram. "That, at any rate, he deserved."

Leaning back in her chair she turned her head sideways, so that her cheek rested on the coolness of the cushion.

"Why should I care?" she said calmly. "Is life so very much better than death? I reserve my pity for the living. The dead have gone to a land where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. Perhaps it is they who are to be envied, after all."

"That is one way of looking at it, certainly. But in any case your victim's transplantation was a little hurried, wasn't it?"

"A little, perhaps. But the exchange was for the better."

"Poor wretch!" ejaculated Ingram. "Even his tragic end failed to make an impression, it seems."

"You think me heartless?" she said in a tone of soft inquiry, looking at him reflectively, with her cheek pillowed on the cushion; "but I am not sure that you are right. I can pity a starving dog or a beaten horse very thoroughly indeed. A man"—she shrugged her shoulders—"that is different! I confess that he does not touch me much in any of his vagaries."

Was it bravado that make her talk like that, or was she

really heartless? Ingram's mind went back to the day of her marriage, and he wondered if it were possible that the sweet-faced, tender-hearted girl should have turned into a woman colder than stone. No, he did not believe it.

She laughed a little and left her rocking-chair.

"We have talked enough personalities," she said, "and I am going to make things more cheerful."

She took a taper, lighted it, and touched up the candles in the sconces on the wall. A fairy flame sprang up wherever her wand lighted.

"Don't you know," she said, "that the most melancholy subject one could possibly find to discuss is one's self? It leads to suicide more surely than anything else."

She laughed again, and went about the room among the quaint, spindle-legged chairs and china-laden cabinets, driving out the lurking shadows from the corners with the magic of her gleaming wand. Ingram's eyes followed her wherever she went. The dark, delicate head, the slender arms uplifted, the soft sweep of her white dress, were all things from which a man would find it difficult to turn away his eyes. Yet he did it—because he did not choose to feel his senses sway him. He rose and turned his back on her, and looked out into the calmness of the evening sky.

The next moment there was the sound of wheels outside, and voices and laughter and inquiries in the hall. The squire and Belle had returned, bringing Major Harburton with them to dinner. Luigia went out to meet them.

Belle felt herself drawn into the house by soft, warm hands and kissed on either cheek, and there was Luigia standing in the lamplight with her eyes brimful of pleasure. She took her upstairs and into one of the large, empty guest-chambers and lighted candles.

"How glad I am to see you!" she exclaimed. "There is no room prepared for you, of course, but that won't take a moment. Take off your hat and let me look at you."

Belle removed her hat, more than willing to be inspected; and holding each other at arm's length, the two girls looked one another over from top to toe.

"Well?" said Luigia, smiling.

"You—you have grown so dreadfully *pale!*" stammered Belle. But these were not the words that had first risen to her lips. She dropped Luigia's hand and turned back to the glass and the reflection of her own brilliant face.

Luigia sat down on the bed with a girlish disregard for freshly ironed quilts, and clasped her hands round her knees.

"Pale, am I?" she said; "but I am very strong. Sometimes I think I shall never die."

Belle looked at her again almost by stealth. She had had it on the tip of her tongue to exclaim, not "How pale you are!" but "How beautiful you are!" yet it was not a strict and tangible beauty. She saw before her a pale, graceful girl, a girl with black hair and eyelashes in striking contrast to the pallor of her skin, a girl with a soft plaintive voice, and a flashing, vivid smile, all the sweeter for its rarity. She saw also that her dress, though the simplest that could be made, fell with a grace that no art could imitate, and that though not, strictly speaking, handsome, there was a romantic, haunting, unearthly sort of beauty about her that was infinitely more attractive than fine features. But she did not choose to acknowledge this in so many words.

She dressed herself with more than usual care that evening, and went down to dinner with the determination to outshine with her brilliance that subtle, haunting charm of Luigia's. She stood before the mirror and looked at herself critically. She was decidedly very handsome—of the Marie Antoinette style of beauty, with a quantity of fair hair and the bluest of blue eyes. Her neck and arms were fit subjects for a painter's brush or a sculptor's tool, and she thought of their fairness with complacency as she went downstairs to the drawing-room.

She found that she had not overrated her power to please. At dinner she had it all her own way. The gentlemen vied with each other in paying her attention, and she usurped the chief of the conversation. The major was gallant and complimentary, the squire devoted, and Ingram more brilliant and animated than she had seen him for years. The

evening passed off well, and Belle was the acknowledged queen of a little court of devoted admirers.

Luigia made no attempt to rival her. She leaned back in her chair, putting in a word now and then, but exerting herself very little for the general entertainment. She wore nothing more elaborate than another white gown, very simply made, and her sole ornament was a bunch of white hyacinths and cowslips that drooped from the band at her slender waist.

CHAPTER XIV.

INGRAM'S IMPRESSIONS.

Jean Ingram awoke next morning in surroundings that were altogether new to him. There were bars of golden light travelling slowly across the white wilderness of the ceiling; there was a bumble-bee buzzing in the curtain at the window; there was the sound of the mower's scythe from the lawn below, and the fragrance of new-mown grass in the room. All the birds of the air were lifting their voices in a rapture of song, and the bees and the flowers and the butterflies rejoiced in the glory of a fresh summer's morning. Even that discontented creature, man, was unable to resist the influences of the hour, and Jean Ingram rose, dressed himself leisurely, and wandered round the room on a tour of inspection.

Oh, the delights of a country bedroom! the delicious fragrance and purity; the indescribable scent of apples and hay and the smoke of wood fires; the muslin toilette and cushion covers, with their delicate frills and spotless crispness; the white wooden wainscoting and wide window-seat, the deep cupboards and crooked alcoves, the sloping ceiling and uneven floor, the hand-sewn bed quilt, with its straggling pattern of roses and blue ribbon; the carved chair, the straddle-legged toilet-table, with bulging front and lavender-scented drawers; the oval mirror, slung at an

impossible angle; and the frowning press, heavy with carved tulips and cupids' heads; the highly coloured picture on the wall, representing "Youth refusing to listen to good advice!"

Then the window!—with its wide, hot seat, its faded cushions, its pile of books, its jar of wallflower. To push the casement wider, to lean out into the sunshine, to breathe the scent of roses growing on the wall beneath, to listen to the birds—to do all this and call the world a hollow mockery is a sheer impossibility. The man must be a brute indeed who could dress among the roses and go downstairs scoffing at the God who made them.

Jean Ingram leaned out bareheaded into the sunshine. There was a straggling lawn below, ending in a wilderness of trees. The dew lay thick and sparkling on every blade of grass, and the blackbird and the thrush were busy with the worms; there was a gardener in his shirt sleeves to the left slaying rank, wet grass with his sweeping scythe; there was the bleating of sheep, the lowing of cattle, the gobbling of turkeys, the clacking of hens to be heard afar. The world looked pure, fresh, natural from that window at that hour, and refused to be reasoned with, coldly judged, and condemned. Ingram gave up the attempt, and abandoned himself for the time being to a refined form of sensuality.

The whole house was charming. On the way down to breakfast there was nothing about it to destroy illusions. Peeps into a delicious old flower-garden from all the landing windows, where the blooming hyacinths stood stiffly in a double row; an old-world scent of faded rose-leaves on the staircase, a whiff of apples at the corners, a rush of sunshine in the wide, cool hall where the sheepdog lay dreaming on the mat, and the white and yellow butterflies flitted gaily past the open garden door in the dazzling heat outside.

To cross the hall and enter the breakfast-room was a fresh delight,—the shaded room, with half-drawn blinds and open windows, the dancing light and shadow, the snowy cloth, the golden honey, the home-baked bread, the wide-mouthed cups of ancient china, the hearty squire in knickerbockers, gaiters, and velveteen-jacket, and, lastly,

Luigia in a sprigged muslin gown, with every dark hair in its place on her small, sleek head, and a soft hand held out to welcome.

Ingram subsided into the chair reserved for him, and applied himself to ham and eggs. He discussed agriculture with the squire during the whole of breakfast, astonishing that worthy man with his professional accuracy concerning pigs, potatoes, foot-and-mouth disease, etc. He was even able to give the exact dimensions of the prize turnip, exhibited at the Edinburgh Show, and to tender information as to the manner in which it had been grown. The squire was delighted with him, and heavily deplored the sacrifice of his agricultural talents in a medical career. He also promised him a long morning among the ploughshares, pigstyes and mangel-wurzel. Ingram bowed before the inevitable, and professed himself enraptured at the prospect.

Just before Belle made her appearance, with profuse apologies for being late. a wasp attacked Luigia's honey, and Ingram, capturing the creature in his bare hand, took it to the window.

"Don't hurt it," said Luigia, with a world of entreaty in her eyes.

"I never inflict suffering if it can be avoided," he replied coolly. "It is not my form of entertainment. And of the two, I would trust myself rather than you to show consideration."

"Why?"

"Because," and he sent the insect buzzing into the garden, and returned to her side, "I imagine that inflicting pain is a species of sport entirely to your taste. I may be wrong. If so, I apologize."

"One knows one's self less perhaps than anybody else," she replied, rising from the table and turning away, "but as far as I have an opinion, I should say that you misjudge me."

The squire, who had left the room with an order for his groom, now returned, and carried Ingram off on the promised tour of inspection. Once, in passing an open window on the ground floor, he caught a vision of Luigia in a white

apron, washing the ancient family china in a wooden bowl. He glanced around the spotless little pantry, with its white wooden shelves, its hooks, and cloths, and cupboards, and brightly polished silver, and then he looked into her face again—and went away wondering what manner of woman she really was.

Some time later Belle and Luigia were standing together in the sunny window of the former's bedroom. Belle had been displaying the wonderful toilettes that were to work such mischief among Luigia's neighbours, and the bed was strewn with ballroom finery.

"Are you not horribly dull, buried down here in the depths of the country?" she said.

From the window, as she looked across the valley to the distant hills, there was not a single house to be seen—only silent woods and sunny meadows as far as the eye could range.

"Dull?" repeated Luigia, with a little inscrutable smile. "Oh no, I am not in the least dull."

"Does anything ever go on here—balls or dinner-parties? Is there any sort of society within reach?"

She turned aside, and, going over to the bed, began to pull out and arrange the flounces of a lace balldress with a reflective air.

"We have balls now and then, and dinner-parties often; but, for my part, I find them rather tiresome than otherwise."

"You have become very fastidious, my dear. One would imagine a child like you, who never had much gaiety, would enjoy it of all things. I'm sure I should, if I had been brought up as you were."

"It is all a matter of taste," said Luigia, looking away to the hayfields.

"And yours is to wait hand and foot on the squire, and visit the potato-fields, and listen to old women's complaints about their ailments and their smoky chimneys? Well, I confess I should go melancholy mad if that were my only distraction."

"People do not go mad so easily," she replied, smiling.

"Well, I don't understand you! To me it would be simply unbearable, settling down in a humdrum way, after travelling about as you have done."

"It is a change. I feel as if I had seen everything and been everywhere, and I got tired of it at last. After all, I find I am more in sympathy with a hayfield than I am with a Parisian boulevard."

She unlatched the iron hasp of the casement, and threw it wide open, standing in the streaming sunshine, with her hands behind her and a smile on her lips, for which she gave no explanation.

"Did you have any fun abroad? Did you get to know people, and mix in society at all?"

"Oh, yes. Rollo makes friends very easily, and we got to know people everywhere. But I don't care much for Continental society; it is generally very fast, and one does not improve in it."

Belle laughed.

"Did they try to make a fast woman of you, you little nun, and did you frighten them all with your great, grave eyes, and drive them away? My dear, it does not do to be too straitlaced in this world, I assure you."

"No," said Luigia, assentingly, leaning in the window.

"What did they make you do?" went on Belle, highly amused. "Drink strong drinks, and smoke cigarettes, and paint your lips, and rouge your cheeks? How very shocking! I shall have to cut your acquaintance, my child."

"My temptations did not lie in that direction," said Luigia, shaking her head. "No! But I drank strong wine of another sort, and I played with fire, and now wine and fire are a necessity to me. They keep one alive, you know."

Belle looked at her with the smile arrested on her lips. What did she mean? There was something mysterious in those words; but, before she had time to unravel their meaning, Luigia had turned from the window with her prettiest and most innocent smile.

"What a lovely dress! Pink silk and Brussels lace, isn't

it? I have a pink silk too, but I never wear it, because Rollo has a fancy to see me always in white. So I wear nothing else in the summer."

"How devoted you are!" said Belle, scrutinizing her covertly.

"Yes," said Luigia, "I am."

Their eyes met, and Belle read in Luigia's that the answer was a sincere one. She loved her husband—yes, but was it with the love of a wife or a daughter?

Belle dropped her eyes, a little confused at having been caught in her scrutiny, and hastened to change the subject.

"Now, tell me," she exclaimed, turning her back on her balldresses, "what society there is here. Is there any one worth speaking to—worth looking at—worth dressing for? I suppose not."

"Thank you," said Luigia, with a sweeping curtsey. "You London ladies make the prettiest little speeches sometimes—without knowing it, perhaps. We rustics have not the knack."

Belle looked at her in surprise. Was she being called to account for her manners? Luigia was evidently no longer a child to be patronized.

"I beg your pardon. I only meant that people get rather prosy after a time, if they don't mix with the world. But, now, tell me, who is there to know here?"

Luigia went back to the window, and, folding her arms on the sill, leaned out into the sunshine.

"Let me see. There are the Harburtons, whom you know already, and who always have a swarm of visitors. You will find it worth while to dress for them, I think. Then there is Sir Ralph Bowden, of Field Hall, and the Maxwells of Burnt Ash Farm—a lot of boys and girls—and Lady Margaret Hanope, a horsey young lady, who lives with her grandmother, and Colonel King, of the Abbey Farm, and, let me see—oh, the parson, and the doctor, and the curate, and one or two stray spinsters, who wouldn't interest you much."

"A fairly long list! And what are they like, these peo-

ple? Mama knew something of Sir Ralph Bowden once, I believe."

"Sir Ralph Bowden is very big, very coarse, very dashing. He wears his hat at the side of his head, and smokes big cigars all day long. His occupation in life is winning money at races and cards. He is at present devoted to Lady Margaret Hanope, our heiress."

"Are they engaged?"

"Oh, dear, no. There is not a man on the face of the earth who weighs so much with her as the hoof on her horse's foot."

This was satisfactory. Belle continued her cross-examination with increasing interest.

"And Colonel King, what is he like? Any sport?"

"Scarcely. He is an antediluvian bachelor, and Rollo's bosom friend. They went to Eton together before the flood."

"And the parson and the doctor?"

"Both hopelessly married, and involved in a tribe of pinafores and sailor hats. The curate is eligible, but his neck is painfully thin, and he has an impediment in his speech."

"Aren't you just a little unkind?" said Belle, reprovingly. "I always make it a point to say nothing disagreeable of any one."

"Oh, you are quite right," assented Luigia; "only in the country, if one is denied the privilege of speech, I don't know of any form of entertainment there is left."

Belle looked at her again scrutinizingly. She did not quite know what to make of these contradictions. Every now and then she talked like a hardened woman of the world, yet her appearance and manner were simplicity and innocence itself.

"Is that all?" she inquired presently, having meditated over the dearth of interesting *eligibles* in the Rodney society. "I mean, all the people I am likely to meet?"

"Oh, there are the Tadcaster set, five miles away. The 173rd is quartered there just now, and you are sure to come across stray officers at every house you go to; and there is

Lord Egan of the Abbey—the really great catch of the place"—her lip curled contemptuously—"but, alas! you will not see him, I'm afraid. He is always abroad."

She leaned far out of the window to pick a big pink rose growing on the wall almost out of reach, and when she got it she tore its petals from it one by one, and making them into hard pellets, dropped them on to the mignonette bed below.

"That is all, I think," she added, after a moment's silence. "The old maids are very commonplace, and—— Oh, there is the Count de Marnay. I forgot him! How unkind of me! He is a very intimate friend. We picked him up in Paris."

"How comes he to be here, then, if he is a Frenchman?"

"Pray don't ask me"—with a careless little shrug of the shoulders. "He is supposed to be studying English, I think, but at any rate his studies are not severe. He comes in to dinner with us nearly every night. He is staying at the inn, and finds it rather dull in the evenings, so we take pity on him, and Rollo gives him the run of the house. He has very good manners, and does not get in the way."

"Is he nice?"

"Fairly. He is a trifle high-flown, and has the most elaborate manners, but I rather like them. They are picturesque, even if they are a little artificial."

She got up and wandered round the room, jangling the bunch of keys in her little apron-pocket.

"Didn't they have funny quaint things years ago?" she observed inconsequently, touching the chintz bed-hangings, on which a thousand peacocks were pursuing as many lizards among a trellis-work of roses and blue ribbon. "I never alter anything in the house if I can possibly help it. It is full of old memories for Rollo, who says he should have been miserable if I had chosen to sweep and garnish it with modern upholstery. But I like it best as it is, too."

"It is fortunate that you and the squire have so many tastes in common."

"Very."

She was jingling the bright bunch of keys and smiling to herself. At the door she paused.

"You will excuse me, won't you?" she said, "but I must go and make apple-dumplings for Rollo's lunch. It is a fad of his, and as much as my place is worth to let the cook meddle with them;" and humming a gay little operatic air, she went off to the kitchen.

An hour later Ingram came upon her in the garden, hoeing and weeding indefatigably, with a pair of loose leather gloves slipped over her hands and a broad-brimmed flapping straw hat low on her brows. She smiled up at him from under its shade, and paused to survey her work.

"I have broken away from the pigstyes," he observed, "and am quite at your disposal. Let me help you. Where have you been?"

"In the kitchen, making apple-dumplings for Rollo."

"Nonsense! You can't make apple-dumplings, surely?"

"After a fashion. But whatever they are like, Rollo eats them and makes me a compliment."

"What an audacious man he must be! I would as soon request a wood-nymph to darn my socks! It could not be more unnatural."

"Rollo does not look on me in the light of a wood-nymph, you see," she replied, turning back to her work.

"He is a most astonishing man!" he ejaculated, standing idly on the path beside her, and watching her pretty, graceful movements with an expression that was critical as well as admiring. "He possesses a wood-nymph, and he tames her apparently, and chains her to the leg of his respectable mahogany dining-table, and expects her to behave altogether like other people. And the most astonishing part of it all is—that she does."

"Our dining-table is oak," protested Luigia.

"Well, it comes to precisely the same thing in the end. The wood-nymph is chained to the dining-table whatever its grain may be. There lies the marvel of it."

The conversation was here interrupted by the appearance of a lanky young lady of about fifteen making for them

down one of the paths, with the long, foolish stride peculiar to the ostrich. A smile broke over Luigia's face.

"Leila Harburton!" she exclaimed, throwing down her rake. The next instant a pair of boney, angular arms were clasped around her neck and her hat was knocked into the carnations.

"Oh, you darling!" cried Miss Harburton, breathlessly, "it's three whole days since I've seen you because that stupid old Fräulein *would* always go the other way. I do hate her! But will you come to tea to-day? Do, do. Father says you'll hate it, but we all want you dreadfully."

She was nearly strangling Luigia with her embraces, and Ingram felt inclined to pick her off by the scruff of the neck, and plant her at a safe distance. But Luigia, who had evidently been through many a similar scene, and learned by experience that it was less dangerous than it looked, replied calmly—

"I shall be delighted, my dear Leila."

"There! I knew you would. Father is a horrid teaze. We're going to have tea in the schoolroom and make toffee afterwards, and Johnnie and Baby Maxwell are coming, and we'll have splendid fun!"

"Delightful!" said Luigia, kindly. "I shall enjoy it immensely."

"Oh, you dear!" cried the girl, putting Luigia through another embrace and trampling more carnations into the earth in her excitement. "And now I must go, because Fräulein is waiting in a beastly temper; and mind you aren't late, and come in a dress that doesn't matter." And with another frantic embrace she was off in the ostrich-like stride.

Luigia turned without a shadow of annoyance to pin up the gathers that had been trampled out of her skirt by a dusty heel. Ingram handed her her hat.

"Rather an overwhelming young lady!" he remarked dryly.

"She is a little upsetting in one's garden, certainly," returned Luigia, regarding her broken carnations with a pitying glance.

"You won't go to this ghastly entertainment?"

"Why not?"

"Can you ask?"—with a French gesture expressive of unutterable things. "Is not the youth of our species a mistake, an infliction, a distressing calamity?"

"I never had any play when I was a child," she said rather sadly, "and sometimes I feel I must make up for it now."

"Very pretty! So is your indulgent kindness to that dreadful, half-fledged goose of a girl!" he remarked, turning to pace the path behind her. "It quite looks like heart, and feeling, and all the rest of it."

"Why have you such a bad opinion of me?"—stopping, rake in hand, to read his face.

"Did I say it was bad? On the contrary, I am prostrate before your many virtues. You make your house charming and your husband happy—a rare accomplishment. If you are a little heartless, what of that?"

"It is foolish to care about anything," she said, stooping to pull a weed.

"Most foolish! I quite agree with you there—it is a remnant of savagery, an antediluvian instinct. Really civilized and enlightened people care about nothing in these days—except themselves."

"Do you know," she said, still stooping over the weeds, "that I always rather distrust those people who pretend to care so little. I believe it is only that they are afraid to let themselves go."

"Go! How?"

She pulled up several dandelion-roots and dropped them into the wooden basket standing at her side.

"It is like a river," she said, after a pause—"a very strong river—that would spread over all the land and lay it waste if it were not kept in its place by steep banks. If it once begins to spread there is no controlling it—none at all."

"I don't think many people need steep banks to keep their feelings in check. Their river is such a tiny trickle that it can scarcely be called water at all."

"Happy people! How safe they must feel!"

"Safe from what?"

"Oh, all the wicked things people with feelings long to do."

"How do you know about people with feelings longing to do wicked things?"

"Perhaps I am one of them."

He laughed derisively, and shook his head.

"Scarcely, I think," he said.

"No?" She stood up, drew off her loose leather gloves, and pushed back her hat; her face was much flushed with stooping and with her exertion in the hot sun. "Oh, but I can care about some things a good deal—quite uncomfortably and to the destruction of my peace of mind."

"What things, for instance?"—with a sudden access of interest in his tone.

She turned away, and picking a large maple leaf from the tree overhead, sat down on a garden-seat near by and fanned her hot cheeks, with her head turned away from him.

"What things?" he inquired again.

"Oh, all sorts—music and flowers and poetry and animals and babies. And," she added emphatically, her pretty lips breaking into a smile, "especially the babies!"

"Anything else?"

"Yes. All things that are ill or in trouble."

"But never a man, I suppose?"

"Oh, never a man, of course;" and she laughed outright.

"Why not?"

"Oh, because"—she turned her lovely eyes upon him, and there was a mocking little smile in their depths—"because he is so dull, so ugly, so uninteresting! Besides, it is not natural for women to like men. It is against nature, you know. There is a sort of antipathy between them that effectually prevents——"

She broke off, laughing, but he caught her by the wrist and made her face him.

"It is an outrageous lie!" he asserted.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Then if it is a lie I have already suffered for it, for you have hurt my hand horribly."

At that instant Belle came out from the drawing-room where she had been practising, and the topic and tone of the conversation was changed.

"And so you have developed into a placid, easy-going farmer's wife?" said Ingram to Luigia that afternoon. "I am a little surprised, I confess."

They were strolling through the fields in the full heat of the afternoon sunshine, and had paused at the stile leading on to the hillside, and were leaning against it to rest. Before them, out to the west, lay the hills, warm and still, with the sheep like white specks on their green slopes, and a stream winding here and there like a silver thread into the valley below.

Luigia was silent. She had picked a large, yellow-hearted daisy from the field-hedge, and was looking down on it as she leaned against the stile. Presently she lifted her eyes.

"Why should you be surprised?" she said.

"Because it seems to me you might possibly require something more stimulating than hills and valleys in your existence."

"Such as balls, operas, drives in the park? But I have never found life in any big city—and I have been to a great many—more interesting than I find it in Rodney."

"My dear Luigia, I do not believe you. You are not the sort of woman who can be satisfied with—just hearing the grass grow."

She looked up, laughing.

"Surely the beauties of nature——" she began, but he stopped her peremptorily.

"Don't evade—yes or no? Are you satisfied? Are you happy?"

"What is that to you? Why should I be allowed no hiding-place? But I know—it is your insatiable curiosity! You would like to put your dissecting knife right into my soul and bring its secrets under your microscope. Suppose I object to having them stared at?"

"A man of science," he returned with a wave of the hand, "is interested in the whole of creation. He naturally includes the human heart."

"That is going out of your line. You make a specialty of skulls and bones and broken limbs. Then keep to them, and let the human heart alone."

"But I am even *more* interested in the ways of men and women!"

She threw away the daisy with a careless gesture.

"Well, suppose I said, 'No, I am wretched—miserable—in despair! These smiling hills make my heart ache; I feel more desolate and lonely among them and in the midst of their beauty than would be possible in an empty, barren land. They rouse in me longings that never can be satisfied, and make me dream of what life might have been and never can be now!' Suppose I said that to you, what good would it do?"

"But do you say that?"

"Oh, no," and she shook her head with a smile. "I do not say that at all. It was a case of supposition only. If I make my answer truly it is, 'Yes, I like Rodney better than any other place in the world.'"

"I don't believe you."

"What a flat contradiction! As it happens, I am speaking the literal truth. Rodney is a paradise to me, a heaven on earth, and if at times I sit down and weep, is not that the way with all of us?"

She had a strange, fantastic way of expressing herself sometimes that was entirely natural to her. With Ingram she found herself always more or less in the fantastic mood. An instinctive friendship had sprung up between them, little as they had seen of each other. He had a way of understanding her through all she said and left unsaid, that induced her to mystify him, and yet in a measure confide in him, leaving him to unravel the puzzle as best he could. It was a relief to her to leave the commonplaces of life and express something of her inner self—a new experience that had a charm about it just because it was so new! She liked his point-blank questions, his determined curiosity, his re-

luctant admiration, and the warfare of words that went on between them, in which she skilfully parried the means he used to fathom her.

And he, why did he find an interest in studying Luigia?

Partly because she piqued his curiosity, partly because he admired her, and partly because he liked her—better than he had liked any woman for years. The friendship between them would have been dangerous had not the love and passion of Jean Ingram's nature been played out long ago; and now only the smouldering embers of an extinct volcano were left to burn themselves away where a furnace heat had once glowed. Luigia knew nothing of his story, but she felt instinctively, as all women feel about some men who come within their radius, that she was powerless to move him. Nothing this world held would ever again effect him radically; his eyes, his voice, his mode of life testified to this, even if his lips never put it into words.

"And why," he inquired, after a pause in which they had both been looking across the valley in the silence of reflection—"why do you worship Rodney? Women always have some romantic, high-flown notion at the back of their fancies."

"Oh, yes," she returned, drawing down the corners of her mouth a little scornfully, "I have a sentimental reason, of course. It is trodden by sacred feet—that is why I like it."

"Yes? I thought so! Whose feet?"

"Can you ask? It is—it must be the feet of—all the sheep, and cows, and pigs, and geese that are passing daily through the village street. There, you have it!"

She laughed in his face, but he did not appear disconcerted.

"You are a wise woman," he returned, "for sheep and oxen are quite as satisfactory as anything else to worship, if human nature would only believe it."

"But it won't," she cried, shaking her head. "It wants something more—something bigger and deeper. It wants life and death, and heaven and hell, and love and suffering—and anything in the world but peaceful monotony!"

She drew her black brows together in a stormy frown, and pushed back her hat with an impetuous movement.

"Oh yes," she went on rapidly, "do not imagine that I never rebel against monotony. There are times when I can scarcely endure it. I sit in the house and listen to the ticking of the clock telling away the minutes of my life—the only life one has!—and everything is still around me. Then comes the clatter of dishes and pans through the silent house, far away, and then all is still again, and the clock goes on ticking as before, and nothing comes to break the monotony. And I feel that my life is slipping away—away—and that nothing more than the clatter of dishes and pans can ever come to me! And then I say to myself that I will not bear it, that life is meant to be enjoyed, and that we are free if we only have the courage to take our fate in our own hands, and I get up and rush out of the house into the sunshine, where the air thrills with life and hope and expectancy, and all the world is beautiful. And it maddens me, and I declare to myself that I will not bear it any longer, but—but I do!"

Her face was turned towards him—eager, quivering, the eyes dilated.

"You are too young for monotony," he said, noting every detail of her excitement.

"Oh, I know I am young," she said bitterly—"young and strong and eager. I am so eager sometimes that I feel all the world and its knowledge and gifts would not satisfy me. I want more—more—always more! I am greedy—horribly greedy; and there are certain things I want to eat. But, no doubt"—and her eager manner dropped from her, and the old contemptuous smile took its place—"if what I long for were given me, I should find some flaw in it."

"No doubt whatever of that! The whole flavour of life lies in forbidden fruit, but only as long as it is forbidden."

"Still," she said, looking away and swinging her gloves idly in one hand, "I should decidedly like to taste my forbidden fruit."

"What is its name? Where does it grow?"

"Its name—is a secret. And it grows out of reach."

"As high as heaven?"

"No"—she turned and looked him straight in the eyes—"I am not spiritual or exalted. I am a great believer in a thoroughgoing, human, earthly joy. It would outrival all the heavens in the universe to me—that human joy, I confess!"

Presently they walked home together, and Ingram speculated silently on what the foregoing conversation might mean. He drew one conclusion from it, namely, that there was a man, a forbidden man, somewhere in Luigia's life. His interest and curiosity were not to be baffled, and he defied her to keep her secret, now that he had got the clue.

Belle came gaily over the grass to meet them as they reached the house.

"Oh yes, my headache is quite cured," she cried, in answer to Luigia's inquiries. "And why did you stroll away like that, you two stupid people? We have had quite a crowd of visitors, the squire and I, and among them the Count de Marnay. What a charming man he is! And, oh, what do you think? There is going to be a dance at the Harburtons' next week. Mrs. Harburton told the squire. What shall I wear?"

"We must give the subject serious consideration," said Luigia, seating herself in a chair by the little tea-table on the lawn.

"I am quite looking forward to it, I declare! This country air has invigorated me already. And as for the Count—how very good-looking he is, and what charming manners! I am quite smitten!" And she turned to Ingram with her most coquettish air.

"Indeed?" ejaculated Ingram, coolly, sinking into a chair at Luigia's side.

"You have no objection if I get up a little flirtation with him, I suppose?"

"Not the faintest. I should enjoy it of all things."

"Really? Why, pray?"—lifting her eyebrows.

"Oh, I don't know. For the sake of companionship,

perhaps. When one has been on the rack one's self it is amusing to see some one else put through the thumbscrew. That is only natural."

"Do you mean that *I* torture *you?*"—coming nearer to him, with the light of flattered vanity in her eyes. "I don't understand."

"I mean nothing—absolutely nothing!" he replied, putting out his hand quickly to arrest her approach—"or, at any rate, nothing that could be worked out by the problems of Euclid. Let us change the subject. The weather is too hot for mathematical accuracy."

At dinner that evening the Count de Marnay turned up, and took his accustomed place at the table as a matter of course. Ingram looked him over from head to foot with a critical eye, and was forced to confess that he found him gentlemanly, irreproachable, and pleasing in manner. Neither could he detect any undue interest in Luigia to account for his desertion of his country, and Luigia herself was as calmly indifferent as usual. Ingram studied the pattern of his plate closely, and wondered what lay beneath the surface of this friendship.

After dinner the three gentlemen betook themselves and their cigarettes to the lawn, where chairs and rugs were placed beneath the trees. It was a splendid evening; the moon had just risen, the air was heavy with the scent of closing syringa, and all around was still. An animated discussion on French politics alone disturbed the atmosphere.

On the night air came the sound of a guitar struck softly, and over the grass towards them a woman's figure in white. She paused a few feet away, and stood in the moonlight, slinging the ribbons of the guitar round her neck. Silence fell on the party, waiting to see what she would do. Presently she broke into a song, which she accompanied by a little swaying movement as she struck the strings of her instrument. Her voice, which she scarcely raised above the pitch of speaking, floated on the night air with an exquisite softness and beauty. It was a troubadour's song—all about a lady, a jailer, a tower, and a lover. The words

were impassioned, and so was the music, and Luigia's voice —was inherited from that grandfather who, some forty or fifty years back, had held the Italian opera house breathless and spellbound as by a touch of magic.

"Bravo!" cried the squire, as the last notes died away. "Sing us another."

"While you lie in the dew preparing for an immediate grave! No, indeed! I came to fetch you in, you horribly imprudent people!"

"Sing us one more, and you shall do what you like with us," pleaded the squire.

"My dear," she returned in her most practical tone, "there is no love-song in the world that is worth a single twinge of rheumatism. Be wise and shun the dew."

She lifted her white skirts as she spoke, and retreated towards the house, where Belle was beckoning from the drawing-room window.

"The idea of *you* preaching commonsense—a siren like you!" laughed the squire, dragging himself up in obedience to her commands. "To listen to your singing one would imagine you were all poetry and romance, and hadn't a practical idea about you."

"It is merely a trick of the throat," she answered him, "one can sing anything, you know. But, in reality, I have very little sympathy with frantic love-scenes in damp gardens. It is so foolish to lay the seeds of rheumatism and consumption when one can avoid them by staying in the house. Still, every one to his taste!—mine, I confess, is creature-comfort."

She laughed a pretty, airy little laugh as she said this, and Ingram, following, muttered to himself—

"It is a lie, my pretty lady! it is a lie!"

CHAPTER XV.

TRESPASSING.

"If I were a poet," said Luigia, "I should sit in that wood and meditate."

She waved her hand towards a tangled coppice, bounded by a low stone wall to the left. Ingram glanced in the direction indicated.

"Is it an inspiring wood?" he inquired.

"Very. A man was found in it once with his throat cut, and the spirit of murder still hangs in the air. Would you like to go through it?"

"Very much. I am not given to poems, but I can sit and meditate on murder as long as you like."

It was early morning. Ten o'clock had just struck from the church spire, and been answered by the silver chimes from Major Harburton's stables a mile off. The squire and Belle had set off immediately after breakfast for Woodleigh, and Luigia and Ingram had strolled down to the village on one or two small errands. They were now returning along the dusty country road, the dogs routing in the dewy, shady hedges, and chasing one another, in the maddest of frolics, through sunshine and shade.

They had been through the village, a rambling, sleepy place, with very little sign of life about. The children were all in school, the men at work in the fields, the women busy in their homes. There was only the miller's man leaning on the bridge while the horses rested from their long tug up the hill, and, further along, round the bend in the village street, an old man on a ladder thatching a roof with handfuls of gleaming straw. That was all. There were waggons resting on their empty shafts, cocks and hens scratching in the roads by dozens, a child on a doorstep eating bread and jam, and a woman's voice singing softly behind the raspberry bushes in one of the blooming strips of garden.

That was all—no stir, no bustle, no traffic. Life was

very slow, very peaceful in this sunny village among the woods and hills. Ingram looked around him amused.

"It is comforting to find that all the world is not living at fever-heat," he observed.

"Yes," said Luigia, "it is pleasant to sit and bask in 'the land where it is always afternoon.'"

"Do you find it so? I suppose so. Panthers are languid animals, fond of basking."

"Panthers?"

"Yes. But their languor is deceptive. They are capable of all that is most sudden, fierce, and passionate."

"Are you speaking of me as a panther?"

"Could I be so rude? I was merely referring to the species."

"Oh, well," she added, after a pause, "even if I were a panther I have no chance in this 'quiet, sequestered vale' of sudden, fierce, and passionate action, as you express it."

"That depends. In prowling through the woods and fields, peaceful and sequestered as they appear, you might by chance light upon another panther, also on the prowl. Then would come the sudden, fierce, and passionate action."

"In what way?"

"Oh, how do I know! Probably in a fight, or it might be in a sort of claiming kinship. Panthers are likely to become close friends when they meet in an alien land."

He whistled to one of the dogs, who was chasing a young bird through the dust, and Luigia broke the silence that ensued by suggesting a raid into the coppice at the roadside. There was a notice-board nailed on to a tree-trunk above their heads, proclaiming that trespassers would be prosecuted. He called her attention to it.

"I never take any notice of that," she said. "The man who owns the property is always abroad, and his keepers and people allow anything. Half the village lives on his game."

"Who is the reckless man?"

"He is a Lord Egan. It is such a lovely place—the Abbey. I used to prowl about it when we first came home last

autumn. It fascinated me. It seemed such a shame!—the rose-leaves fluttering down on to the terraces, the fruit rotting on the walls, and the fountains going on dripping, dripping all day long, with no one to look or care."

"Is the man a young prodigal or an old *roué*?"

"I don't know whether he is a prodigal, but he is young. He spends his existence hunting lions and tigers and buffaloes and bears. He goes all over the world—India, Asia Minor, America, sleeping in tents and under trees, like a savage. I don't know where he is now—anywhere that isn't civilized, I suppose."

They had climbed the low stone wall, and were making their way through a copse, black with shadows, where masses of ivy hung heavily in the trees, and the smell of leaf-mould rose as it was stirred by their feet. Here and there they came upon a deep hollow or a silent pool lying among and half overgrown by underwood. Now and then the stillness was broken by the scamper of a rabbit through the brambles, or a bird's fluttering wings as it flew from one bough to another. The light even at noonday was faint.

"The murdered man was found under this beech," said Luigia, pointing to a gnarled tree-root near where she was standing. "If I wallowed in ink and had dishevelled hair——"

"Don't do it," interrupted Ingram, hastily. "The poem would not be half so pretty as the present neatness of your head."

"That is putting my poetic talent on a very low level."

"Not at all. It is placing your *coiffure* among the works of art that are not to be rivalled."

"How clever you are, Jean!" she said admiringly.

They emerged at last into a sunny park, full of oaks and bracken and deer. The air was quivering with summer heat, myriads of gnats were dancing madly in the golden sunshine, the hills looked blue in the distance.

"It is here," said Luigia, waving her hand theatrically, "that—if I were that poet of the wild hair—I should bring my young lovers. I should call the poem 'Love's Golden Dream,' and I should sit them down—hand in hand, of

course—under that oak over there, and make them look round them with a blissful sort of feeling that life was going to be all like this—glorious and golden and full of peace. Don't be alarmed; I was not going to break into verse, though I own you had cause for alarm."

"Don't refrain on my account," returned Ingram, politely. "There are few things I cannot take with a smile."

"In this instance your smiles would be out of place," she rejoined.

They were crossing a wide, open sweep of undulating parkland, trampling the bracken remorselessly under foot. The smell of sweet, hot, dry grass filled the air. Here and there an open glade swept away through the trees, with the deer browsing in graceful herds in its hollows. As far as the eye could see it was all hot, beautiful, still.

"After all," she ejaculated suddenly, "perhaps things are *meant* to go right. Even *I* sometimes think so in the midst of a scene like this."

"Do not expect a golden dream," returned Ingram; "for the world is not built on those lines."

"Why does it seem to promise what it will never fulfil?"

"To chasten and subdue the spirit of man into meekness, and—make him say *damn!*"

"Mr. Ingram!"

"Oh, I know I'm a criminal; but when one talks of promise and fulfilment, surely there are excuses for strong language."

"Has life been so very hard on you?" she said gently.

"It has not been exactly a golden dream, and I have been chastened and subdued to such a fine pitch of perfection that I shouldn't know what to do with one if it came."

"How sad!" she said, more gently still.

"Yes, quite heartrending," he rejoined, and he laughed.

Presently they came in sight of the Abbey—a pile of grey-stone building, with numberless roofs and turrets and chimneys. The windows and doors in front of the house were shut and shrouded, and there was no sign of life about. The terraces and gardens stretching around it were scorching in a blaze of heat, but the urns were empty of flowers

and the statues smothered in a rank growth of creeper. The place was evidently neglected to a great extent by the servants left in charge.

"It is a thousand pities to desert it," said Luigia, looking round her wistfully.

"Not if he likes lions and bears better. The man is no fool if he can get enjoyment out of life. He is a lucky beggar—even if the halls of his ancestors mingle with the dust in consequence."

He followed her up the terrace steps, over which a neglected vine had laid a thick carpet of trailing sprays and leaves. They walked along the façade of the house, peeping in at the darkened windows, trying the handles of barred doors. Here the sense of desertion was greater than ever. As she had said, the rose-leaves were fluttering from the walls of the house, vines had grown rampantly over stonework and statues and steps, trailing creepers hung forlorn and disregarded.

"I don't know why it is," she said, as they passed slowly along the front of the house, "but things that are deserted and sad and going to ruin always appeal to me more strongly than things that are happy and fortunate and prosperous. I wonder why?"

"It is fashionable to be morbid," said Ingram, coolly, "and distinctly plebeian to be happy."

Luigia laughed. "You and I," she said, "must be very blue-blooded. We ought to be able to roll billiard-balls under our insteps, and——"

She broke off suddenly in what she was saying, and her words ended in an exclamation of startled surprise. They were turning a corner of the house, and had come upon a broad gravel path lying before the western windows. Ingram's eyes took in at a glance the reason of her sudden ejaculation and subsequent silence.

It was only this: A long, open window, a striped linen awning, a cane lounge, with a man at full length upon it—a man with a pipe in his mouth, a newspaper hanging idly in his hand, a couple of spaniels and a collie at his feet. The master of the house, apparently, returned from his

travels, and enjoying a morning *siesta* under pretence of reading the daily news. Nothing so very alarming in any of this, surely, yet Luigia had turned distinctly and unquestionably pale. She stood where she was hesitating.

The man rose and came forward. He had taken the pipe from his mouth and thrown it and the paper carelessly behind him on to the lounge ; the dogs were slinking forward, uncertain whether to be friendly or antagonistic. Their master held out his hand to Luigia.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mrs. Rodney," he said.

Ingram would have been surprised, if he had been capable of being surprised at anything, at the fact that Luigia and this strange man met as acquaintances. In the chance remarks she had let fall about the master of the Abbey she had said nothing that led him to suppose she knew him personally. However, it was now evident that she did. She gave him her hand, and pale as she still was, she had perfectly recovered her composure.

"Quite unexpected," she was saying in her lightest manner. "I imagined—or should have imagined, if I had thought about it at all—that you were in Kamschatka or Timbuctoo."

"No, I am down here for a week or two."

"Is Rodney aware of the honour ? I fancy not."

"I only arrived last night."

"Unexpectedly, then ?"

"Yes. I wired to the servants an hour before I left Paris."

She looked at him beneath her lowered lashes with a smile so cool as to be almost contemptuous, and it was evident that, lord of the soil and heir to many illustrious ancestors as he was, she held him in small esteem.

"Really," she observed, "you should prepare us a little for these sudden visitations. Suppose we took them badly —shrieked, or fainted, or otherwise exposed ourselves—how unpleasant! Allow me to present my friend. Mr. Ingram —Lord Egan."

The two men shook hands, and Ingram looked his new

acquaintance over from head to foot without appearing to do so.

He was standing before them bareheaded on the sunny path, a quiet, well-dressed young man of about six or seven and twenty. At first it seemed that his eyes were black, but after a time Ingram remarked that this effect was due to a curious dilation of the pupils, and that when they contracted again, as they did to a certain extent at the end of a minute or two, they were in reality of a deep dark blue. His hair was straight and black, his teeth very white, his complexion sallow; there was a newly healed scar on his left cheek. He had a subdued, unassuming manner, and his movements were inclined to be indolent, but there was the grace of good proportion and latent strength about him, and it was easy to believe that, if called upon for action, he would be found capable of swiftness, activity and endurance. As a rule, perhaps, he was not inclined to exert himself.

"Come and sit down," he said, turning back to the lounge-chair under the awning. "I will have some more of these things brought out."

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Luigia. "Delightful as it would be to idle away an hour in your society, I am afraid we cannot stay a moment, can we, Mr. Ingram?"

"The voice of duty," observed Ingram, morally, "is not to be disregarded under any circumstances."

Lord Egan smiled a quiet, subdued smile.

"In this instance," he remarked, "I do not think it is exactly the voice of duty that calls."

"No?" raising her brows with a pretty air of inquiry. "But I assure you, I have numberless paupers at this moment awaiting food and clothing at my hands. I am due in all sorts of places——"

"Anywhere but here, in fact?"

She turned to Ingram with an aggrieved air.

"Listen to that! Lord Egan doubts my word! Please clear my character. Have you not frequently seen the poor of the parish bathing my hands with grateful tears? Are they not at this moment clustering round the Manor gates for alms?"

"If my testimony is of any value," said Ingram, "I have much pleasure in assuring Lord Egan that I have repeatedly been a witness to these touching scenes."

"There!" she exclaimed, with a wave of her hand. "I told you so! Mr. Ingram's word is, of course, conclusive."

"Entirely. I withdraw my observation," said Lord Egan.

She held out her hand.

"Then good-bye. You see, I really must be off. I am so sorry we disturbed your *siesta*. By the way, we have not yet explained our sudden appearance. I suppose we are trespassing, are we not? Shall you have us up? I hope so."

"I shall be happy to do anything you wish."

"I do wish it—at least as far as Mr. Ingram is concerned. I should like to see him handcuffed. You would, of course," turning to Ingram, "be too philosophic to struggle?"

"I should endeavour to comport myself with dignity," returned Ingram, "however trying it might be."

"Oh, I am sure of that. You would never give way to loud words or unseemly scuffling. I will visit you in prison and read you tracts. Possibly it might be the making of you in the end, who knows?"

It seemed to Ingram that she was talking somewhat at high pressure, though her words were light enough, and her manner absolutely under control. But she was still pale, and when she was not speaking her lips trembled. She stooped over one of the dogs, and began caressing it. He noticed as she did so that her hand was trembling also.

For the moment Lord Egan had forgotten Ingram's presence, and was looking at her as she bent over his dog. There was an intensity in his eyes that was not lost upon Ingram. The collie was licking her hand. He stooped down, and, taking the dog by his collar, thrust him behind him with a command to lie down. The action was very quiet, but very decided, and Luigia said nothing.

He walked with them bareheaded through an old fruit garden to a door in the wall leading into the park. He did not appear to be brilliant in conversation, and it was Luigia

who did all the talking, uttering any airy nonsense that first came to her lips, not a word of which any man could have taken seriously. Ingram backed her up by a casual remark now and then. At the wall-door she held out her hand for the second time.

"You need not pilot us any farther. I will lead Mr. Ingram home. He has implicit faith in my guidance," she said.

Lord Egan shot a swift glance from her to Ingram, and a slight momentary shadow, which Ingram interpreted as jealousy, passed over his face, but he said nothing. He leaned against the door-post, with his hands in his pockets.

"You have not told me yet," he said, more by way of prolonging the conversation than from any hope of a definite answer from Luigia, "what reason you had for coming. If——"

"Ah!" she said, looking round her, and up into the sky, with a provoking air of irresponsibility, "why was it? I really forget."

"If a lie would be of any assistance——" began Ingram, but she waved him aside.

"No. Let us be truthful at all costs. It is more noble, and quite as satisfactory. We came simply and solely because the spirit led us this way, and because the notice-board said that trespassers would be prosecuted if we did. If you do not prosecute us——"

"I shall be wrong, as usual, I suppose?" he interposed.

"You will be wrong, as usual," she echoed, with a slight laugh as she turned away.

She and Ingram crossed the park almost in silence. The heat was excessive, the birds too drowsy to sing, the deer sleeping in the fern under the shade of the oaks, and only the voice of the grasshopper to be heard in all the miles around.

"Speaking of panthers," said Ingram at last, with the disinterested air of one who discusses natural history, "I should imagine that our friend Lord Egan has something of that animal about him."

"Should you? How?" she inquired carelessly.

"His quietness and languor are treacherous."

She looked away towards the deer without replying.

"In your prowls," he continued, "have you met him often?"

"Not often. He is generally away. He came down last autumn to get well after an accident, and stayed over Christmas. I met him then."

"Often?"

"Oh no. At first he was too ill to go out much. He had a friend staying with him, a Captain Dowie: a very nice man."

"Nicer than Lord Egan?"

"*I* got on with him better. I shall never forget how kind he was to me in Rome once when I spoilt my dress at a picnic. He pretended he did it, and every one forgot to look at me. I was very grateful."

"Oh, so you knew him in Rome?"

"Yes—years ago—just for a week."

"And Lord Egan too?"

"Oh, they were together, you know, in our hotel. We came across them by chance. It was ever so long ago—just after I was married."

"Ah!" ejaculated Ingram.

Another long silence ensued, and they emerged from the park into the road near the Manor grounds.

"There is just one little point that I should be obliged if you would explain," said Ingram, opening the gate into the meadows for her to pass through. "Why, in the first instance, did you so carefully conceal the fact that you knew Lord Egan?"

"I did not conceal it," she answered proudly; "it seemed to me a matter of no importance one way or the other."

"I see," rejoined Ingram, with a quiet, unexplained smile.

"Now, to me," he was saying to himself as he carefully closed the gate again, "it seems to be the one fact upon which everything else turns. And if I am wrong, my name is not Jean Ingram, nor is yours Luigia Rodney, and we shall have to begin all over again on new premises."

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. HARBURTON'S DANCE.

THE next day Ingram returned to town, in spite of all persuasions to the contrary, and Belle felt a certain degree of relief when he was gone. She begged the squire and Luigia to keep her engagement secret for the present, and in the mean time she felt free to amuse herself as far as she chose.

She was taken to call in every direction, and accepted everywhere as an immense acquisition to Rodney society. She was invited to all the tennis and tea-parties for miles round; pressed into the service of the Vicarage bazaar in aid of foreign missions; admitted to the choir; stared at in church; dangled after by the curate, Captain Douglas, and the other stray men of the parish; and generally acknowledged as the belle and the leader of fashion, amongst the country bumpkins.

At the beginning of the second week of her visit, Mrs. Harburton's dance was to be given chiefly in her honour.

"I got it up specially for you, my dear—you and the Watson girls who are staying with me, you know," said kind-hearted Mrs. Harburton, bustling in on the morning of the dance, to find Belle and the Count playing tennis on the shady Manor lawn; "so mind you keep yourself fresh for the evening—and Luigia, don't you let her play any more, or she'll be quite knocked up, and then how shall I face all the disappointed young men who are looking forward to dancing with her?"

"Oh, I shan't be tired," cried Belle, coming up, racquet in hand, with her sweetest smile. "Thank you so much, dear Mrs. Harburton. You don't know how much I am looking forward to it."

"Such a pity Mr. Ingram couldn't have stayed for it! A day or two more couldn't have mattered. However, what do you think?—such a fortunate thing"—turning to Luigia. "Lord Egan is down for a few days, quite unexpectedly, and

dropped in yesterday. Of course I made him promise to come; and you know how nicely he dances. No, I can't stay, thank you. I've a thousand and one things to do, as you may imagine. Good-bye till to-night. Mind you come early, and keep yourselves fresh. No, don't trouble. Oh, very well, then, if you insist;" and with her arm in Luigia's, she made her way back to the little pony-carriage standing before the Manor door.

"Is Lord Egan nice?" inquired Belle, when, tennis over, and the Count dismissed, she found Luigia in the store-room turning honey into a glass dish.

"That depends upon the taste and fancy of the individual," returned Luigia, intent on business.

"Do *you* like him?"

"I? Oh, I have never considered the subject. I think I like him well enough—as well as most people."

She stood the empty jar on the window-ledge, her forehead drawn into a little frown of preoccupation.

Belle wished she would forget the honey for a moment, and give her attention to more interesting matters.

"What is he like?" she persisted, leaning against the cupboard door and fingering her racquet with an assumption of indifference.

"What is he like?" repeated Luigia, stooping to a row of jam-pots on the lower shelf; "well, he is not nearly so good-looking as Captain Douglas, or so musical as the Count, or so lively as Sir Ralph, but he dances well, and dresses nicely, and passes in a crowd without notice. Voilà tout! He is exactly like every one else."

She was off and away with a pot of jam to the kitchen. Belle was still leaning against the cupboard door and examining her racquet when she returned with a jangling of keys, to lock up the stores again. The frown of preoccupation had vanished now, and her brow was as clear as the summer skies.

"What are you going to wear to-night?" she asked. "Something extra pretty, I hope. You will make your formal *entrée* into our Rodney society, you know, and I want you to take it by storm."

"I can't decide; I wish I could," cried Belle, eager and animated in a moment. "Some people think I never look so well as in pale blue, but I rather fancy pink myself; and then there's that sweet French muslin with the pansies and the Mechlin lace. What do *you* advise?"

"Let us look them all over again," said Luigia, kindly; and with Belle's arm round her waist, they went upstairs to re-inspect the ball-dresses.

It was certainly a rather important occasion, this *entrée* into Rodney society at Mrs. Harburton's dance. There were, besides the men from the barracks (any one of whom might chance to be a wealthy elder son), Lord Egan and Sir Ralph Bowden to be fascinated—both men of good family and large property. Belle's spirits rose as she prepared herself for the fray by lying down in the afternoon with drawn blinds and her hair in crimping-pins. When she began to dress, Luigia gave up her own maid to aid the already distracted Louise in her numerous duties.

"You can choose from these," said Luigia, coming into her room that evening with her hands full of flowers. "I don't know which you will like. Count de Marnay and I have been picking them for you."

Belle, sitting before her glass, sipping tea, and surrounded by eye-washes, curling-tongs, and ball-room finery, turned to make her selection.

"How good of you! But aren't you going to dress yourself? It is nearly eight."

"Oh, there is no hurry. Count de Marnay and I are going to practise a sonata first. He has brought his violin on purpose. And Rollo has not come in yet."

"Ah, perhaps when I am married I shall take everything with *sang froid* too!" remarked Belle. "But I must say I should be sorry at present to feel as little interest as you do in a ball."

"I am an old married woman, you see, and that makes all the difference," she replied, tucking some roses carelessly into her waistband. "I have no conquests to look forward to."

She lifted the deep fringe of her lashes for an instant,

and in the brown depths of her eyes lay the sparkle of mischief.

"Adieu," she cried gaily as she left the room. "I must not wait, or I shall be scolded, for I can hear by the scrape of the Count's violin that he is getting impatient;" and away she went to the sonata and her musical friend.

Belle looked after her reflectively.

"I wonder if that man is in love with her?" she mused. "It is strange his following them from France and hanging about in this way. If so, she manages very cleverly not to let it be more apparent. Sometimes I think she is deeper than she looks. There was mischief in her eyes just now. I dare say she is not altogether the innocent little thing she seems. And the poor old squire adores her and thinks her faultless—but, then, it would be easy enough to hoodwink him!"

An hour later Luigia came in again, having dismissed the sonata and the Frenchman, and was so sweet in her anxiety that Belle should look her best, and so unselfish in yielding her Matilda's services, that she repented her recent uncharitable suspicions, and told herself that Luigia was a dear little affectionate thing, and quite incapable of carrying on intrigues under the honest noses of her husband and friends.

A little later again and she was summoned from her room. On the great oak-panelled gallery she found Luigia ready dressed, with the squire, resplendent in a white waistcoat, as a porter of wraps in the background.

Luigia looked lovely with a loveliness that was haunting and dangerous. She came up to Belle with soft, slow movements, the white silk and lace of her skirts drifting behind her like the foam of the sea. She held her head with the grace of a flower, and in the black, silky coils of her hair gleamed a diamond star. Her slender arms were bare, and she carried a bouquet of white lilac and heliotrope that perfumed the air as she moved.

"Come along," cried the squire, "we are late;" and he took hold of Belle's arm with a playful squeeze. "What

do you think of Luigia?"—in a mysterious whisper as they descended the stairs behind her.

"She is beautiful!" returned Belle, determined for once to utter her admiration generously.

"Isn't she? There's no one to touch her!" he cried, looking down on the white sea-foam with the pride and delight of proprietorship.

"Hush!" she said, pausing at the foot of the staircase to smile up at them. "I can bear all you say, and you are making me dreadfully vain."

"Be vain if you like, my darling," he said, coming up to her, "for you'll always be perfect anyway;" and he put his arm round her waist and kissed her tenderly.

"How disgraceful of you, Rollo!" she exclaimed, as she moved away. And meeting the eyes of her footman upon her, she bent her head to hide the smile that was hovering on her lips.

Nearly all the guests had assembled, and dancing was in full swing when the Manor party arrived. Mrs. Harburton immediately brought up a train of men to present to Belle, amongst whom was Sir Ralph Bowden, a large, florid man of about forty, in a white waistcoat with a showy buttonhole and diamond studs. He was not handsome, his face was red and coarse, and his eyes dissipated-looking; but every man may be looked upon as prey by a beautiful woman, and becomes interesting as he withstands or falls beneath the influence of her charm. She proceeded to ensnare him by coquetting over her programme. He proved himself fully equal to the occasion, and succeeded in obtaining more than a fair share of it for himself, and in carrying her off for the first dance.

Luigia, meanwhile, was surrounded by a group of gentlemen, mostly old friends, to whom she was dealing out dances with great fairness, while the Count de Marnay stood aloof, and scowled as darkly as good breeding admitted. When the music struck up afresh, he elbowed his way through the crowd, and, putting his arm round the sea-foam, whirled it off into the giddy throng—for there was an understanding between them that they were to

dance certain numbers of the programme together wherever they met at a ball.

Belle had her triumphs too, and made several decided conquests. Sir Ralph was the chief of them, the most devoted and the most promising. Still, there were others that served to amuse her in odd moments, and though the "Maxwell boy" was hopelessly young, it was gratifying to observe him gnashing his teeth as she passed him in the arms of that unpopular person "another," and though the curate was lean-necked and lantern-jawed, it pleased her to gather that he laboured under no rooted objection to blue eyes, and that hair of a worldly golden hue was not exactly his *bête noire.*

"I'm having a splendid time!" she whispered to Luigia, meeting her in the middle of the evening near the door for a moment. "Everything is perfect—floor, partners, music——"

"And I," rejoined Luigia, "have danced my shoes into holes, literally and truly into holes!"

Belle was borne off again before she had time for another remark, and Luigia stood back against the wall while her partner, Captain Fletcher from the barracks, mopped his forehead surreptitiously. She lifted the big fragrant bouquet to her lips and looked over it with searching eyes. The room was empty, blank, dreary! So was the staircase and the hall and the conservatory and every hole and corner of the place. There was no one there, no one, that is to say, whom she cared to speak to or dance with. It was nearly twelve. The evening was passing—another wasted evening—slowly and drearily away. She was tired of dances, tired of making small talk, tired of her partners, tired of everything, in fact—though she would not acknowledge to herself that by any possibility the aspect of things could have been changed.

"Shall we have another spin?" suggested Captain Fletcher, restoring his handkerchief to its accustomed place.

"If you like," replied a very languid voice, and the eyes and the nosegay were lowered, and she set out again on the

dreary round of meaningless movement. Can anything be more foolish, more miserable than to dance and laugh and flirt with an aching heart?

Shortly after midnight that vague something for which she had been waiting came. All at once the blank places were filled, the lights grew brilliant, the music exciting, her heart beat fast, and the ache in it died away. On lifting her eyes once as she and her partner were waltzing round the room, she caught sight of Lord Egan leaning in the doorway watching the whirl. It was his first appearance that night. She dropped her eyes and floated past him, but there was extra colour in her cheek, and she answered her partner's next speech wide of the mark. When she passed him again she was talking gaily, and did not lift her eyes. But she knew that her skirt touched him as she whirled by, and that his eyes were on her and following her as she drifted away again. When next she saw him he was waltzing with Lady Margaret Hanope, and it was they who were doing the laughing and talking, and she who now was silent. The words dropped from her lips as she saw them go by, the bright colour that had sprung into her cheek drained away, she lifted her head with a proud little gesture that had no reference to anything her partner was saying, and deliberately turned her back on them.

"Let us dance again," she said to him, though they had only that moment paused after a long spell. And, much flattered, he led her forth once more.

It was near the end of the evening when, as Belle was chatting with the new arrival to whom she had just been introduced, Luigia swept up to them in her trailing silk and laces with the perfume of heliotrope about her. She was unattended.

"Belle, my friend, you are monopolizing the lion of the hour and making enemies all round. Lord Egan, if you do not wish to create jealousy you should deal out your favours more fairly."

She held her head erect, and met his eyes fully. There was a curious challenge and defiance in them and in her manner as she addressed him, and in spite of her flattering

words, it was easy for all the world to see that he was not in her favour.

Lord Egan, who was leaning against the wall, turned slowly as she spoke to him.

"You flatter me," he said coldly.

"Is that possible?"—laughing airily. "There are some people one can never flatter. I am conscious of the poverty of the English language on the present occasion."

He made no answer, but looked past her at the couples strolling by.

"Are you such a hero?" exclaimed Belle, turning to him with a laugh. "I had no idea of this. For what is he famous, Luigia?"

Luigia opened her fan and waved it slowly to and fro. Over the top of the soft white feathers she looked at him, and there was the spirit of mockery lurking in her eyes.

"Oh, yes, he is a tremendous hero! When he came down to Rodney in the winter, he was such an interesting invalid—we all competed for the honour of nursing him. He had been half eaten by a tiger, you know, and we found that an irresistible attraction. We waited on him hand and foot, and now——"

She paused, regarding him through her lashes with smiling insolence.

"And now," she continued at the end of the slight pause, "we are naturally jealous if our invalid allows himself to be monopolized by any one but his lady nurses. Hence my attack!"

Belle was laughing. "Is it true?" she said, turning to him. "Were you really nearly demolished by a tiger, and did Mrs. Rodney and all the other ladies nurse you back to life? How interesting!"

"I believe Mrs. Rodney sent to inquire for me twice," he replied, still looking over her head at the passing people. "I do not remember the nursing she speaks of."

"What!" exclaimed Luigia, "when you spent the whole of one Sunday afternoon on the couch in my morning-room, and I did nothing but devote myself to arranging cushions and altering the blinds?"

"I remember the occasion," he replied, "but I do not remember the cushion and blind part of it."

She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly.

"Give me a man for ingratitude! Well, there is nothing more to be said if you persist in denying my devotion. Belle, I see Rollo coming to claim you for the Irish jig. I hope you feel equal to severe exertion? His mother was an Irishwoman, which perhaps accounts for the vigour with which he dances it."

As the squire came up, radiant and eager, she laid her hand on his arm.

"Have mercy on poor Belle, Rollo dear. Remember how you tore my dress last time!"

"All right, my pet. Who's your partner? Not got one? How comes that about? But you'll look after her, won't you, Egan?—there's a good fellow. Come along, Belle, and let's show them how to do it;" and without waiting for further discussion, he jigged her off in a rapid race to the further end of the room.

Luigia and Lord Egan were left standing together against the wall. She turned to him with the same odd mixture of smiling defiance and contempt.

"So we are thrown on one another's hands without choice? What shall we do? Stand here and quarrel, or dance and be silent?"

"If the choice is left to me I should prefer——"

"Oh, but it is not left to you. On second thoughts I don't think I want to dance, and I love quarrelling above everything on earth. Suppose we go and do it outside. It would, at any rate, be cooler, and the darkness will hide our expressions if we want to give way to emotion."

She pointed with her fan to the open window, and he offered her his arm in silence. They threaded their way through the room and out through the long French window on to the terrace, where the light from the stars shone in strange contrast to the glare of gas from the dancing-room. They walked to the further end in silence, she leaning on his arm with negligent grace, her trailing skirts sweeping

the stones behind her with a soft sound like the swirl of the sea on the shore.

"And how are the deserts?" she said abruptly, as they paused to turn; "as fascinating as ever?"

"I have not been near 'the deserts,' as you express it, since before Christmas."

"Not since the tiger-accident? Dear me, what an age! And you find you can exist without them?"

"I can just exist, yes."

"I did not know that was possible. I thought lions and tigers and elephants and deserts were absolutely necessary to your existence. It must be charming to care for anything like that—even if it is only miles upon miles of sand!"

"It is better to be as you are, and care for nothing and no one in heaven or earth."

"Do you think so? Well, I am not sure. It must lend a zest to life to be enslaved, even if, as I said just now, it is only by sand. How are your arms and legs and ribs and all the other things that were nibbled by that tiger? Better?"

"Much better. Quite well, in fact."

"What a pity! You looked so interesting, limping about and with your arm in that sling. Why not have a relapse and put on a bandage or two again! It would be quite worth while."

"Are bandages becoming?"

"Very. You have no idea how the white suited your complexion. I could hardly forbear expressing my admiration. However, I remembered *les convenances* and was silent. Women are trained to conceal their feelings, you know."

"Whether they have any or not?"

"Oh, they always have them. They are such emotional, highly strung creatures! For my own part, I am for ever concealing and smiling sweetly as though there was no aching wound behind. It is heroic, but I do it. How is the place on your cheek where the tiger scratched it? Healed?"

"Quite healed."

"You don't feel it at all?"

"Only when I look in my shaving-glass and realize that my beauty is marred for ever."

She glanced at him in the white starlight. The scar was very apparent, even in that half light.

"Yes, your beauty is marred for ever," she echoed, and her voice, in spite of her, had in it a sort of exultant joy. "It is an ugly place, very ugly. What does Lady Margaret say to it?"

"Lady Margaret? What is it to her?"

"A good deal, I imagine. Perhaps, though, it adds to your charm in her eyes! Women sometimes admire these things. They think it interesting and touching and romantic. They feel sure you couldn't get scratched by a tiger without being brave, and they fall down and worship you and your tiger-scar like heathens before their idols in the dust."

She laughed scornfully. In her beautiful eyes there was an evil spirit urging her to torment and ridicule him beyond endurance. But she did not succeed. It was difficult, apparently, to strike a spark from the flint.

They were strolling backwards and forwards along the gravelled terrace. At the further end they paused beside a seat, and she withdrew her hand from his arm to sit down.

"It is dusty," said Lord Egan, putting out his hand to stop her.

"And is dust poisonous?"

"No. But it will spoil your dress." He took out his handkerchief and swept it from end to end.

She stood aside with the gleaming folds of silk gathered in her hand, and waited till he had finished. Then she seated herself, opening her fan languidly, and leaning back among the dark leaves of the passionflower that clambered up the wall.

"What a pretty thing in nature this masculine reverence for gowns is! We would do anything—sit anywhere—but for the man at our side who reminds us in awestruck tones

that we are going to be rash. Why does he care, when it is not he who provides us with new ones?"

"It is an instinct, I suppose."

"A very generous one! Do you know, I am quite beginning to admire the masculine nature—simple and primitive though it is."

He seated himself at the other end of the bench, and picking a blossom from the wall behind, twirled it round and round in his fingers, looking down on it. She was watching him with a faint, half-contemptuous smile.

"You are such savages, you men!" she went on. "You are made on broad, straight, primitive lines. You hunt and fish and shoot and love and hate with all the strength of your nature, and you write your feelings in capital letters all over your faces for every one to read. You haven't developed subtlety, or any of the finer arts. I wonder if you ever will—whether you are incapable of them, or only backward."

She spoke reflectively, softly fanning herself. He went on pulling the passionflower to pieces, petal by petal.

"I admire the savage," she went on; "but he has his drawbacks. It is, of course, difficult for the modern woman —who is a civilized being—to get on with him. We women have shot ahead of you men in subtle development, for some reason or other, and we mystify and baffle and bewilder you in all our dealings together. If men and women were meant to be companions, and to understand one another, then men should have been started a few thousand years earlier. As it is, you, poor creatures, are only half civilized."

"What have I done that is savage and half civilized?" he said, throwing away the mangled passionflower into the darkness.

"My dear Lord Egan, what an idea! As though I could possibly refer to *you*, even in the most remote manner, as a savage and uncivilized person! I was speaking of your sex, of course, not of you. You ought to know me better."

"I don't know you in the least. I only know you hate me." He had taken her fan, which she had discarded, and was opening and shutting it mechanically, stroking its

soft, white feathers, and curling their tips round his fingers.

"Hate you? What an accusation! Now, that is savage, if you like—horribly blunt and savage! Oh, no, I don't hate you in the least, I assure you."

"Nothing you can do or say would make me believe otherwise." He snapped her fan in two in playing with it, and one of the soft white feathers fluttered to the ground in the darkness.

"*Nothing?*" She turned on him slowly, and, leaning forward, looked into his eyes. In the dark pupil of each of hers he could see the tiny reflection of a star shining.

"Nothing!" he repeated with impassioned emphasis.

"I wonder," she said softly to herself, and as she looked at him, her lips parted with a little smile, and her beautiful eyes grew soft.

As he looked at that sweet face so near him, his own changed indescribably, darkened and grew pale.

"You would flirt a man's soul out of him, and fling it back in his face," he said through his set teeth, and, rising abruptly, he turned his back on her.

She rose too.

"Must we go back?" she said, lifting the flowers to her face. Then she looked up at him over them. "So you have found out that I hate you, have you? I must be scarcely as civilized as I supposed if I cannot conceal my feelings better than that. It is a distressing revelation! I thought the capital-letter business I spoke of just now belonged entirely to the masculine sex. What else may I not have revealed? Horrible idea!"

He turned back instinctively, and offered her his arm. She did not take it immediately. She was brushing the flowers backwards and forwards against her lips.

"What is to be done to mend matters?" she said after a moment. "I will try to improve—I will honestly try to improve, but I am afraid my trying will not make much difference. There are some people, you know," and she looked straight into his face with her most inscrutable smile, "to

whom one is naturally antagonistic without rhyme or reason. And there is no getting over that sort of thing."

She laid her hand on his arm, and turned towards the light streaming from the open windows at the other end of the terrace.

"I dare say my prejudice is unreasonable," she pursued, smiling sweetly, "and I promise I will try to overcome it. I can do no more, can I?"

"I have broken your fan," he said, holding it out to her with no attempt at an apology.

"Indeed? Oh, it does not matter in the least, not the least in the world. Fans can be mended more easily than some other broken things one knows of. A little glue—*et c'est un fait accompli!*"

She walked back beside him along the terrace, with her head bent and the flowers still to her face. At the entrance to the dancing-room she paused and turned to him.

"Lord Egan, you do not understand women and their ways—what man does for the matter of that? Don't take us too seriously and—go back to your deserts."

"I am going."

"But I mean *soon*."

"I am going soon."

She looked over her shoulder quickly. Her next partner was coming to claim her.

"And *stay* there?" she added emphatically.

"When I go I shall go for ever," he answered.

She made no reply, and Captain Douglas came up to her. "Our dance, I believe, Mrs. Rodney," he said with a little formal bow. As she went off she turned to look back at him over her shoulder, with that rapid, fleeting smile that might mean so much or so very little. "I am glad you are not going to abandon your tigers!" she said. "It is so evidently your *metier*—slaughtering animals!"

Her laughing, taunting face floated away from him even as she spoke. He turned, and going into the smoking-room, poured out brandy and water with a reckless hand. He was very pale.

She was dancing with her husband when he saw her

again at the end of the evening, the maddest of Post Horn galops. The train of her dress was flung over her arm, her white shoes, with their diamond buckles, gleamed beneath the rich lace of her petticoats, her bouquet and fan were discarded on a rout-seat at the side of the room, and she had given herself with abandon to the dance. The old squire held and guided her with a pride that could be read in every feature of his face. As the last shrill, wild notes of the music ceased they came to a standstill near him.

"Warm work, Randal, my boy!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Better suited to you young fellows than to me. But Luigia declares I have some spirit left in me still, and don't make a bad sort of partner on the whole."

"You are delightful!" she said with her soft smile. "I like a really reckless galop—anything else is tame work. I suppose we shall come to grief one of these days, but no matter!"

She reached for her bouquet and fan, which Lord Egan handed her silently.

"Thank you." She held out her hand to him. "Come and say good-bye to me before you go. It will not be for a week or two, I dare say?"

"It may be to-morrow."

"So soon! That is distressing! Rollo, where is Belle?"

"What's all this?" cried the squire with an expression of consternation. "You're not going off again yet, surely? Nonsense! Stay at home, like a sensible man, and look after the land."

"My dear Rollo," said Luigia, laying her hand on his arm with a graceful air of persuasion, "you don't understand these things. What are you or I compared to a wild beast for excitement? And as for the dear savage, why, I love him myself with or without his war-paint and feathers. Lord Egan and I are perfectly agreed on that one point, however else we may differ." She laughed and passed on.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTERNOON CALLS.

"It was a nice little dance last night," said Belle, the next day, laying down her book and yawning. "I really enjoyed it very much."

"Did you?" said Luigia, stitching industriously without looking up.

"Well, didn't you? You danced everything, except when you disappeared and sat out with somebody."

"Which happened once, I think."

"Oh, well I didn't keep a strict account. I only know you were missing when we tried to get up that new Polish dance, and the Count said you were out on the terrace with Lord Egan, and offered to fetch you."

"He is always so kind!"

"But the squire wouldn't let him. He said you got tired if you danced everything, and he liked you to sit out now and then, so we did without you. What a devoted lover that dear husband of yours is! He's as bad as ever."

"Or, rather, as *good*."

It was afternoon—a long, hot, sleepy afternoon—and since lunch not a word had passed between the two inmates of the quiet and shaded drawing-room. Belle had been engrossed in a novel, Luigia sewing indefatigably at village flannel petticoats in her low deep chair.

It was very delightful staying with Luigia, but there were also moments of *ennui*, when, deserted by the male sex, Belle found time drag on her hands. To-day the squire was out, no one had called, the Count had ridden over to Tadcaster, and Luigia was aggravatingly content to sit sewing without exhibiting the slightest interest in the coming or going of admirers. To Belle this was inexplicable. But, as admirers themselves were absent, perhaps the next best thing was to discuss them.

"Lord Egan is rather interesting-looking," she said, laying her book face downwards on her knee, with her eyes on

the hands of the clock, and thoughts of tea floating in her mind. "Does he come here often?"

"He is nearly always out of England."

"Then you don't know him as well as you do the Count?"

"Oh, not nearly. The Count is one of ourselves—quite a tame cat about the house."

"You danced with him a great number of times last night."

"Not so often as I did with Rollo."

Belle smiled. "Oh, I did not mean to insinuate anything; but, really, I do think you seem to have a pretty good time at a dance, and the squire is awfully good-natured not to mind."

"I don't know what you mean by 'a good time.' I was tired to death the whole of yesterday evening, and absolutely uninterested in my partners. I should be more than willing never to go to another dance as long as I live."

"My dear girl, what nonsense at your age!"

"My age is any age that is no longer young."

"You were twenty-one last birthday."

"That is counting by years. I am counting by feelings."

"Just because you are married! How absurd! As though people are to settle down into a humdrum, housekeeping sort of existence just because they have a husband. *I* shall not give up society when *I* am married, I assure you."

"Housekeeping is a fine art, and I enjoy it; but talking to vapid young men in society has no compensation, and never soars into the realm of poetry."

"What an extraordinary person you are, Luigia!"

"All human beings are extraordinary," she returned, unimpressed by the assertion.

The next minute the squire came in, and with him tea and cheerfulness. He was in riding breeches, and threw his hat, gloves, and whip on to a chair as he entered the room, then as hastily collected them again, and deposited them in the hall.

"A remnant of my bachelor ways," he said, apologetically to Belle. "I used to strew my things all over the place, but since this little woman came to take care of me, I am learning manners, am I not, Luigia?"

"I don't mind your bachelor ways," she said, looking up with a smile, "and you may put your hat and whip where you like. You know that."

"Because you are such a lenient little sweetheart. But that's no reason why I should take advantage of you, is it? What's that? A skirt for some old village goody?"

He dragged forward the music-stool, and seating himself on it at her side, leaned towards her, fingering the flannel in the foolish, aimless way men have when they are in love with the woman who is putting in the stitches. She allowed it to be dragged out of her hands, and turned to the tea-table at her other side.

"She's a regular Lady Bountiful to all my poor people," he cried, turning to Belle with admiring pride. "But she overdoes it. Why don't you get a woman to sew all this, pussy?"

"I'm a woman myself," said Luigia, pouring out the tea.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the squire; "well, I suppose you are; I don't doubt it. But I won't have that first finger of yours made havoc of. The last time I looked at it it was a disgrace to my name. Have you worn the gold thimble I got for it?"

"A gold thimble for my first finger!" exclaimed Luigia, glancing at Belle with an expression that seemed to say, "Did you ever hear of anything so absurd!" "Yes, I have worn it, and preserved the precious finger, and laughed at you every time I put it on."

"I don't mind your laughing at me if you obey me. Let me see for myself, madam."

She held out a dusky forefinger for inspection. He took it, examined it, kissed it, and returned it to her. Having done so much, he felt a desire for more.

"I say, you haven't kissed me all day," he said.

"Haven't I?"

"No. You might give me one now. I'm sure Belle would excuse it."

"Rollo, please behave properly and take this tea over to Belle."

He rose obediently, advanced toward the cup she held out to him, kissed her while it was extended in mid air, so that she dared not move for fear of spilling it, and then chuckling heartily at the success of his *ruse*, carried it to Belle, who was regarding the little domestic scene with a lenient smile.

"You will excuse it, I know, Belle, my dear," he said. "For I haven't seen her since breakfast, you must remember, and, after all, she's my own wife, and there's no reason why I shouldn't."

"Except that I particularly object," said Luigia, with a touch of real indignation in her voice. "And if you please, Rollo, you will pick up my cotton which you have knocked down, and find my needle which you have unthreaded."

The squire, all meekness at once, went down on all fours after his wife's belongings, and while he was thus ignominiously engaged, his niece, Mrs. Harburton, came in. She sank into a corner of the sofa, while Luigia poured her out some tea, and he, from force of habit, retired to the hearth-rug, where he drew his coat-tails through his arms and warmed his back at the empty grate, now filled with summer plants and ferns.

"Well, and how do you think it went off last night?" began Mrs. Harburton, in her loud, cheerful voice. "Very hot for dancing, *I* thought, but you young people didn't seem to find it so. Jinny and Flora didn't get up till nearly twelve this morning—dreadful, wasn't it? And now they're hard at tennis, though I tell them they will knock themselves up completely, and I shall send them home looking wrecks."

The squire came forward with the tea, and Belle waited on her with muffins.

"You must all come back with me to tennis, and stay the evening," continued Mrs. Harburton, who, like the squire, was the soul of hospitality. "That good-looking

Captain Douglas is coming, and Sir Ralph said he might drop in, so the girls want to get up a good set. How did you get on with Captain Douglas, Belle? He danced with you an unconscionable number of times."

"Oh, I always think in the country one is allowed a certain amount of licence in these things," returned Miss Carmichael, looking a little self-conscious; "and really he danced better than anybody in the room, so I was sadly tempted."

"Not better than Lord Egan. Did you dance with him? But he wasn't in good form last night. He was detained, and came late, you see, and he said he didn't particularly care about dancing, so I didn't trouble. He was telling me that his sister, Lady O'Hagan, is coming to the Abbey next week. Did you hear that, Luigia? She's home from India, you know, and living with her aunt, Lady Meldrum. Poor little thing! I always thought that marriage of hers a perfect sin!"

"Why? How?" inquired Belle, who felt an interest in the near relations of any eligible man.

"Oh, she was so young, only seventeen, and he over fifty, with bandy-legs and a bald head. As though any girl could possibly care for a man like that! No wonder it turned out as it did."

"Is she not fond of her husband?" asked Luigia.

"Well, there were stories, but one never knows how far they are true. There was a Captain Wilde, I believe, a handsome, good-for-nothing fellow, who flirted with her a good deal. There was no harm in it, of course, but Sir Thomas packed her home to her aunt, and I suppose she will remain with her till he comes himself in the spring. Lord Egan said they were both coming down to the Abbey next week. That will mean a series of dinner-parties for the whole neighbourhood, I suppose."

"I am afraid so," said Luigia, "since the barbarous custom of eating in public has not yet become obsolete. What is this Lady O'Hagan like?"

"She was a nice, bright little girl when she married. I haven't seen her since, and don't know how she has devel-

oped. Now she has a little girl of her own, which must be a great consolation to her."

"Oh, she has a child, has she?"

Luigia rose as she spoke to greet a new arrival, who was being announced at the door, and, interested as she felt in this girl-wife, who had been sent home because of a handsome Captain Wilde, she was obliged to forego further conversation on the subject and devote herself to her new visitor.

The lady who entered was a Mrs. Frayling, wife of the colonel of the regiment then stationed at Tadcaster. She was an elegant, faded woman, with a small drab face and dust-coloured hair. She was richly dressed, and had a sentimental, *empressé* manner.

"*Such* news, dear Mrs. Rodney!" she began at once, holding Luigia's hand while she turned to the others. "I'm *so* happy. *Do* congratulate me. What do you think? My darling Eda is going to be married to Captain Dowie—Ronald, of course *I* call him, and we're *so* pleased about it. It was only yesterday, you know, and—oh, *thank you*, a cup of tea is *so* refreshing!"

Every one offered their congratulations. She sank into a chair, still holding Luigia's hand.

"You can *imagine* my feelings, I was *so* anxious. You *know* how much attention he paid her at Christmas, and how *constantly* he had been down to see us since, and my *poor* Eda——! But yesterday she came to me and told me all about it, and Ronald spoke to the colonel so frankly and honourably, and, *of course*, we had no objections; so it is all happily settled, and I really am more pleased and thankful than I can ever say."

More congratulations were poured forth, and Mrs. Harburton and Belle entered into the subject of the trousseau with great animation. The happy couple were to be married at the end of the summer, she said, and the one-day-old engagement was discussed eagerly from every point of view.

"Yes, I'm *so* thankful!" sighed the happy mother, as she gave the squire her empty teacup. "Young men are *so*

unprincipled in *these* days—are they not?—that really sometimes I almost feared that my darling child would be sacrificed to a heartless flirtation. Lord Egan now—just think what attention he paid Lady Margaret Hanope last winter, and nothing came of it, you see. Why, he might well have broken the poor girl's heart! And as for the stories one hears about the way he has been going on in Paris——!" She finished her sentence by a gesture of the hands more expressive than any words.

"I don't know anything about Paris," broke in the squire, "but as for Lady Margaret, she hasn't a heart to break. If she's got any feeling at all, it's more for her horse than anything else."

"Do tell me the stories about him," said Luigia, lying back indolently in her deep chair. "I am just in the mood for scandal."

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Mrs. Frayling, with a glance at Belle, "and there is *nothing* I object to like spreading gossip, but really I have heard it on good authority—not dear Ronald, of course, *he* wouldn't betray a friend, one knows—but from *quite* as trustworthy a source, and he says he saw him at Monte Carlo gambling like a madman, losing *everything* one day, and winning *thousands* and *thousands* the next, and doing it all as coolly as if he was just sitting down to dinner."

"Pooh!" ejaculated the squire, bluntly, "I don't believe it. It isn't like him."

"I do assure you it is quite true." Mrs. Frayling's voice took an injured tone. "My husband was over there at Easter, and—oh well, I didn't mean to say who my informant was, but, of course, you see I really *have* a means of knowing—well, my husband told me in confidence when he came back, that he was doing his best to knock himself to pieces with gambling and horse-racing and late hours, and afterwards he went to Paris, you know, and fell madly in love with an actress. They were seen about everywhere together, quite openly, driving in the Champs Elysées, and at the opera, and sitting in the cafés. I was dreadfully shocked, as you may imagine, but John says ——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the squire, indignantly; "as though a man couldn't drive down a street with a pretty woman without losing his character! I beg your pardon, madam, but if there is one thing I detest more than another on the face of this earth, it is gossip."

"Oh, so do I," simpered Mrs. Frayling, "but of course I am bound to believe what my husband says, dreadful as I think it."

The squire, oblivious of good manners, broke into a short whistle, and strolled to the window.

"Hot day, isn't it?" he exclaimed, thus artfully endeavouring to change the subject. Then catching sight of his cowherd standing stick in hand on the lawn, he stepped outside. "You will excuse me one moment —most important—back directly;" and he made his escape.

Mrs. Frayling shook her head mournfully; Luigia was regarding her with a curious, languid scrutiny. A few minutes ago her face had flushed hotly, but the colour had died down again now. She was as composed and indifferent as usual.

"Rollo is too good-natured to relish scandal," she said, "but I am quite spiteful enough to enjoy it. Do tell me some more. Who is this actress?"

"I am afraid I don't remember her name, but she is quite new, and all Paris is raving about her, John says. She is very beautiful, of course, and always dresses in green, and won't wear anything but emeralds—such an expensive taste! These actresses are always eccentric in one way or another. It is part of their business."

"A strange idea, that dressing in green!" said Luigia, slipping her wedding-ring backwards and forwards on her finger, "but I dare say it looks pretty. And he fell madly in love with her, did he?"

"So I hear." She rose to go, but lingered a moment to impart a still more spicy detail. "And they said in Paris that he, Lord Egan, gave her a set of emeralds that cost—oh, something like half a million of money, and that he has had to let Nether Castle in consequence."

"What a romantic young man!" said Luigia. "I call it quite mediæval devotion, don't you?"

After she had gone, Mrs. Harburton, who had been talking confidentially to Belle in the corner of the sofa, bustled her and Luigia off to get their hats and racquets. She and the squire would walk on, she said.

Luigia went to her room. It was a large, long room, with several windows, all of which were open. The little frilled white muslin curtains were fluttering in the soft summer air; it all looked cool, and fresh, and pleasant. She went over to the wardrobe and began pulling out the drawers one after another in a preoccupied manner.

"Dear me, what have I come for?" she asked herself after a moment with an impatient frown.

It was her hat she was looking for, which was lying on the bed, but she stood still before the open drawer, looking down on its contents with eyes that were fast losing their preoccupation and filling with a concentration of feeling. She had forgotten the hat and the tennis and Belle waiting below.

It was her wedding-gown that lay there wrapped in fair white linen, like a dead thing. There were sprays of withered orange-blossom lying in its folds. She took them up one by one to look at them, and the hot colour rushed back into her face. Yet they were not the sprays she had worn at her wedding, nor were her thoughts gathering round her husband. They were gathering thick and fast round some one else, and round the night when she had last worn that gown nearly three years ago at a ball in Rome.

She stood at the corner of the wardrobe, with her head leaning against its dark oak panel and her eyes on the withered flower in her hand. Her present surroundings faded from her sight, and she was again in Rome, a two-months' bride. It all came back to her—the strangeness and the wonder of the new life and the new cities and the new emotions that came crowding upon her from every side. She was a child again, a restless, eager, romantic child. The pictures and the music and the moonlight, the great love lavished upon her, all combined to stir depths

hitherto untouched, and she was filled with a longing after something she could not define. She had been vaguely dissatisfied though her every whim was gratified and her surroundings left her nothing to desire. Then came a man into her life for seven short days and everything was changed. By his side she had looked at the pictures again, and listened to the music and sat in the moonlight, and, lo and behold! a meaning had come into it all, and her soul no longer reached out after something it could not find. It stood still, listening and waiting, but content.

Who can explain that instinctive, unreasoning attraction that some people possess for us? The door opens, a voice is heard, an eye meets ours, and the whole world is revolutionized in an instant. Our fancy is caught, and caught for ever. Cool judgment and worldly wisdom are powerless against it, it dominates us without reason, without apology. Who can explain it? Is it only chance—a blowing of the wind where it listeth—or is it a spell of the serpent who tempteth the heart of man away from his God? For certain it is that this instinctive, instantaneous, ungovernable attraction of one human being towards another is a power for evil rather than for good, and holds in its keeping a torment of passion and pain for its victims that leaves them scarred and maimed for the rest of their days.

Luigia had not reasoned about it at first; she had only lived and felt. But then came the night of the ball, when she had worn her wedding-gown with the sprays of living orange-blossom in her hair. He had danced with her oftener than was wise, and everything combined to make him lose his head. The rooms were crowded; there were people from all nations waltzing, flirting, laughing round them; there was heavenly, melting music, an intoxication of light and noise and whirling figures. She had known nothing like it before or since. Before it was over he had taken her away to the coolness and solitude of the terraces, where they were alone beneath the dark Italian skies. She remembered the look of the gardens below, the white flowers lifting their faces in the moonlight, the heavy scents of evening, the gleaming stars, the man leaning near her on the balustrade

in silence. She had talked a little, because she was shy and afraid to be silent; she had pointed to the fountain dropping its silver spray into the darkness, and then—how had he answered her? He had stooped suddenly before she knew what he was going to do, and taken her in his arms and kissed her passionately, and then was gone—hidden in the darkness. She had not seen him again.

The next day he left Rome suddenly, recalled by a telegram, so he told the squire, but she herself had never quite believed in the telegram. He only wanted to escape from his evil deed, she thought. Anyway, he was gone and Rome was empty, and so were all the other crowded cities they visited, and there was a sense of irreparable loss upon her. Under it she changed from a child into a woman, and with it came the desire to fill the void. So she danced and flirted and mocked at herself and others in every gay capital in Europe, and came home at the end of the three years with the well-earned reputation of a heartless coquette. But little she cared! Why should she not flirt and dance and sing away her days if it helped to fill their emptiness? Then, when she had steeled herself into the belief that she had killed outright all the heart she ever had, she met him again.

He had come down to Rodney in the autumn in the convalescent stage after a long illness, and she had met him everywhere. Their intercourse had been all of one sort—a deadly warfare. He had asked her once to dance with him, and she had told him coldly and deliberately that she would never dance with him again. In return, he had told her equally haughtily that he would never repeat the request as long as he lived. Since then they had met continually: she had waltzed and flirted with every other man in the room; he had devoted himself exclusively to Lady Margaret, the handsome, fast, heartless heiress. When forced to speak to him, she had mocked, taunted, ridiculed him, shown him how little she remembered, how little she cared. She had succeeded beyond her utmost expectations. Revenge is sweet, and if he had once flirted with her, she had since taught him what flirting meant. The harm done by that

kiss in the darkness given the child, had been repaid threefold by the hand of the woman—a hand as cruel and relentless as it was soft.

"Poor, senseless little fool that I was!" she exclaimed to herself as she stood looking down on the withered sprays—"fool to go mad as I did! But I am not the child he took in his arms and kissed that night!" She flung the flowers on the floor and trampled them under foot with passionate scorn. "I am a different being altogether, and I will make him suffer for what he did."

She picked up the withered, trampled sprays, and flung them out of the window.

"He flirts with every woman he comes across!" she said in her heart, fiercely. "It was me once, then it was Lady Margaret, now it is this mad actress in Paris. Let them put their faith in him, if they choose, it is less than nothing to me!"

"Luigia, Luigia, when *are* you coming?" came Belle's voice along the landing; and, hastily pinning on her hat, without looking in the glass, she ran down.

"What an age you have been!" ejaculated Belle, meeting her at the foot of the stairs.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said quietly. "I was—busy."

At the beginning of the following week, Rodney society flocked to call on Lady Meldrum and her niece, who had arrived at the Abbey with their servants and baggage. Luigia and Belle were among the number. They tried to press the squire into service and induce him to accompany them, but he refused firmly, and suggested the Count in his place.

"An elegant Moosoo is much more at home in a drawing-room full of fine ladies than I am," he asserted, "but I'll drive over with you, if you like, and go on to Bevington afterwards about that cow."

So it was arranged, and the ladies with white parasols, and the Count in an irreproachably fitting frock-coat and lavender kid gloves, were packed in the carriage shortly after three o'clock one afternoon. It was dull and cloudy

looking, and raincloaks and umbrellas were stowed away by thoughtful servants at the back of the carriage. The squire, with his hands on his knees and his weather-eye cocked, admitted that the country needed a washing, but feared that Luigia would have to say good-bye to her bonnet in a good cause.

"I am sorry to say it, my dear," he said, "as it is a particularly pretty one."

"I can make another if this is spoilt," she replied. "It is only a handful of net and a rose."

"To me," murmured the Count, regarding the bonnet with emotion, "it has not the appearance of this earth. *C'est un rêve de Paradis!*"

"What a wonderful imagination you have, Count!" observed Belle, a little piqued at this direct compliment to Luigia. "I could never by any possibility connect a shilling's worth of tulle with heaven."

"Nevertheless, it is quite true," exclaimed the squire, "that everything a pretty woman wears or has about her becomes wonderful and unearthly in the eyes of her mankind. I used to be terribly afraid of all Luigia's belongings, and even now sometimes I scarcely dare to touch her parasol or her dear little gloves when I come across them lying about in the hall. I perfectly understand Count de Marnay's view of the bonnet."

"How too foolish!" said Luigia, smiling, as she laid her hand on the squire's knee for a moment with a caressing little gesture. "And yet I understood it, too. Nothing has intrinsic value—it is only the way we look at it. What is the army flag, for instance? Only a rag, too thin and old and torn to be of use to any living soul, yet every man in the regiment would give his life to save it. The sentiment is real, not the flag."

"Who are these people?" interrupted Belle, who was uninterested in the prevailing topic of conversation. "Are they going to call at the Abbey, do you think?" An open carriage passed them in a whirl of dust.

And for the rest of the way the squire devoted himself exclusively to her, pointing out the various objects of inter-

est as they passed, and enlightening her as to the name, antecedents, and character of all those people who bowed to them on the road.

On nearing the Abbey she became interested in the scenery, and drew forth as much information as she could concerning it. Oh, yes, it was all Lord Egan's land, most of the hills within sight belonged to him too. It had been in his family for generations, and the timber was particularly fine. They were driving rapidly through an open park shut off at intervals by gates and wire fencing to separate the cattle; to the right lay a wood behind a paling; to the left an extensive sweep of undulating park and meadow land dipping down to the valley a mile away. The walls of the Abbey could be seen now and then through the trees.

Presently it came fully into sight. It was a stately pile of grey buildings, worn and mellowed by time; the windows were heavily mullioned, the casements latticed. Before it stretched sunny lawns and gaily filled flower-beds, with here and there a fountain playing and a peacock strutting proudly over the grass. The entrance-hall filled her with admiration; it dated back to feudal times, and was hung with spears and shields and coats of mail that had done service in many a crusade; but there was no time to look at these things, for the velvet-footed servant was preceding them up a shallow, comparatively modern staircase to the drawing-room, in which Lady Meldrum was receiving. The room was filled with people talking together in subdued voices, and there was the pleasant clatter of teacups.

Luigia made her entrée very gracefully, and Lady Meldrum received her and her party with a proud courtesy. She was a stately, white-haired old lady, arrayed in flowing garments of rustling silk; her niece was smaller and less imposing. Lord Egan was not there. Belle, on ascertaining this fact, devoted herself to Lady O'Hagan: if one cannot have the sun, it is policy to make the most of the moon.

Luigia talked to her hostess, and to the stout vicar, and to Mrs. Maxwell in turn. Every now and then she stole a

covert glance at Lady O'Hagan—the girl who had married an old man and loved a young one. There was nothing romantic-looking about Lady O'Hagan, but then, as Luigia well knew, appearances are often deceptive. She was a be-frizzed, be-ribboned woman of society, with very high heels, a very small waist, and a rather loud voice. Luigia turned aside and gave her entire attention to Mrs. Maxwell, who was giving her details of the last cook's insolence—she had lost faith in the tragic love-story.

Just before she rose to go, Lord Egan entered the room, and, since she was then talking to Lady Meldrum, he merely shook hands with her and sat down by Belle, remaining at her side during the minute and a half that ensued before they rose to leave. Belle was quite in her element, gushing about music and painting and scenery. She did so long to see the pictures at the Abbey, she said; some of them were so famous, she had heard. Oh, might she really go through the gallery one day? That was too kind! She should live in expectation of doing so. What would Lady Meldrum say? Was he quite sure it would be convenient?

The question was referred to her ladyship, who was gracious enough to say she should be charmed. She would send a note one day soon, she said. Belle thanked her effusively and took her departure, feeling that she had made a good impression all round.

Lord Egan saw them to their carriage, and moved forward with Luigia. The count and Belle fell behind.

It was quite a long journey from the reception-room to the entrance-door—down a great spiral staircase and through the ancient hall. It was impossible to avoid getting up some show of conversation on the way.

"Miss Carmichael is coming over one day to see the family pictures," said Lord Egan, as they began to go slowly down the great staircase.

"May I come too?" said Luigia. "I should like to see them before you part with them for ever."

"I am not going to part with them," he said in some surprise.

"Not?"—raising her eyebrows. "I have been led to understand that from Christmas to Easter you spent your entire time in trying to lose everything you possess."

"Oh," he said calmly, "and who told you that, I wonder?"

"An amiable, mutual friend. Isn't it true, then? There are impressive rumours going about of your sitting night and day, winning and losing thousands with immovable, marble features. Have we been misinformed?"

"Not altogether. I did my best to go to the dogs, but they wouldn't have me. I won more than I lost." He was jingling the loose money in his pocket with a reckless sort of swagger.

"You speak sadly. Are the dogs such pleasant company?"

"As good as any other."

"The style of your conversation betokens recklessness, I fear," she said, turning her lovely eyes on him, full of the old malicious smile he knew so well. "You make me anxious. How painful if these noble halls"—waving her hand theatrically—"were brought to the hammer, and long-nosed Jews hacked down the trees in the park!"

He laughed a short involuntary laugh, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know that it would make much difference in the long run," he said.

They were going slowly down the staircase into the great entrance-hall, hung with armour and littered with bear and tiger skins, which he had shot himself. She glanced around her, then at him. There was a moody, dejected expression on his face, and he was looking down, not at her. There was a ray of light slanting down on to him from a narrow slit of a window somewhere above them; it seemed to her that he was pale.

She lifted her head, and looked straight in front of her with a cruel little smile of triumph. When cats play with mice their worst qualities come to the fore. She told herself that she enjoyed the game.

"You distress me beyond words!" she exclaimed at the

end of that silent survey. "I can scarcely believe it—you would part with these helmets, these tiger skins, these romantic heirlooms without a tear? How unnatural!"

"I don't find that they add materially to my happiness," he replied.

"Poor thing! you *are* miserable!" she said, changing her tone to one of ironical sympathy. "And wasn't she touched when you even professed yourself willing to part with your ancestors' helmets for her sake? She must be of stone!"

"She? Who do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, I don't know her name—a syren in green. The rumour I spoke of just now travelled from Monte Carlo to Paris, and placed you at the feet of a fascinating actress with a bias for emeralds."

"So the amiable mutual friend gave you that story too?" he exclaimed bitterly.

"Yes, and I found it even more interesting than the one with the marble features."

He made no reply. They had reached the bottom of the staircase, and were crossing the polished flooring of the hall between the tiger skins. The folding leaves of the entrance-door were flung wide, and two menservants were standing on either side of it. But servants, as all the fashionable world knows, have neither ears nor eyes, and, quite regardless of them, Luigia continued her species of delicate cross-examination, and Belle, on the staircase behind, flirted openly with the Count.

"Do tell me about her," continued Luigia; "you will find me all sympathy and romance. I am so interested in love affairs. Is she beautiful? Is she fascinating?"

"People say so," he answered, without a shadow of interest in his manner. "I tried to find her lovely, and I tried to be fascinated, but I failed."

"Failed?"

"Yes. She bored me at the end of two days, and her feet were large."

She laughed as they went out on to the doorstep.

"Dear me! Yet, in spite of her large feet, you followed

her about for weeks, and half ruined yourself buying her emeralds."

"Yes, I did. What then?"

He confronted her with a dogged, moody air, and in his eyes there was a mingling of resentment and despair.

"Oh, nothing," she returned with an airy laugh; "only I don't quite understand."

"It isn't likely that you would. You don't understand anything that has to do with me, and you don't care! It was a choice between her and blowing out my brains, and I chose her. She kept me from that—at any rate, for a time."

The vehemence of this speech, though suppressed, made itself heard in every word, and as she listened to it her eyes dilated and her lips turned pale.

"You have never thought of doing such a thing!" she exclaimed, and there was a thrill of horror in her voice.

"I have thought of it often," he returned, "and if I did it I believe you would be *glad!*"

She turned away. The carriage had returned and was waiting for them on the gravel sweep before the door. She went down the shallow step and patted one of the horses on its glossy neck, stroking it and calling it endearing names.

She kept her back turned to Lord Egan, who stood on the step behind her. Presently she turned; the voices of Belle and the Count could be heard coming through the hall.

"You are wrong," she said. "I am not in the least fond of bloodshed—unnatural as it may seem. Besides, it would interfere with our summer gaieties, and—who knows?—we might even have to go into half mourning."

She came up the steps towards him, and for an instant she laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't do it," she said in a sweet, appealing manner. "Spare us the agony—of going into half mourning;" and she laughed mockingly as she turned away from him towards the others.

The promise of rain did not fulfill itself in a downpour

till the Manor party were safely in the house and dawdling over a second tea in the drawing-room.

"What a charming woman Lady Meldrum is!" remarked Belle, who was a little elated at the success of her visit and the promised invitation to view the Abbey pictures under Lord Egan's escort; "so much better bred than Lady O'Hagan. I wonder if she really fell in love with that man, as they say?"

"No," said Luigia, "she was only flirting."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, there is a sort of freemasonry that tells me she hasn't a heart to lose."

Luigia was standing in the window watching the large drops of rain splashing on to the wallflowers outside. She looked pale and languid, all her vivacity had died down. She was tired, she said, and had a headache. She had taken off her little bonnet and thrown it aside on to a chair, as though its weight oppressed her. Her husband came behind her and smoothed back her hair fondly.

"So we saved the little bonnet, after all, didn't we? Headache bad, eh? Let me kiss it away, like they do to the children," and he turned her face to his and kissed her pale cheek gently. "There, does that feel better?"

She smiled faintly, and let him put his arm round her waist. They stood together looking out into the rain.

"What big drops! Do you remember that wet day in Rome, when you got left behind in the church, and Egan brought you home under a market-woman's umbrella the size of a small tent?"

"Yes."

"What! did you know Lord Eagan in Italy?" cried Belle, in astonishment. "I never heard that before."

"Oh, yes," said Luigia, "we met him in Rome just after we were married. He was there a week."

"And this pussy," cried the squire, pulling her ear, "got left behind, adoring the Virgin or some such thing, and Egan went back for her, and half an hour afterwards they came walking in together, under an old fruit-woman's umbrella that he'd bought at the corner of the street for ten

francs when it wasn't worth as many sous. Rascals, those Italian thieves, every man Jack of 'em!"

"Dear me, I had no idea you were such old friends!" observed Belle.

"We are not friends at all, for the matter of that," said Luigia, indifferently. "We have nothing in common and, if we talk at all, we quarrel."

"I can't think why you don't like him," ejaculated Belle. "He has such particularly nice manners."

"He is a very good fellow," put in the squire, warmly, "and a gentleman to the backbone."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Gentlemen to the backbone are all very well in their way," she observed, "but they are apt to be a trifle dull. With some people, you know, the only thing left one to do is to quarrel;" and she sauntered from the room, swinging the heavenly bonnet carelessly by its strings.

Upstairs, in her own room, she sat down in a rocking-chair and buried her face in her hands.

"How he must hate me!" she said to herself. "How vile and detestable he must think me! He looked pale and wretched, and I rubbed it in—I rubbed it in! It was like kicking a wounded animal——"

She shivered, dropping her face still lower in her hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DINNER PARTY AT THE MANOR.

At the end of the following week, a large dinner-party was given at the Manor in honour of Lady Meldrum.

On the morning of the day, Belle and Luigia were busy arranging the vases and fruit for the dinner table. There was a tray full of exquisite hot-house flowers on the table in the morning-room, another of empty vases, a third with moss, ferns, grasses, wire, scissors, and a big jug on the floor

full of water. Luigia's sleeves were rolled up above the elbow, she had a big white apron tied loosely round her slender waist. The squire sat afar off, reading the morning paper.

"What a domesticated creature you are?" ejaculated Belle, as Luigia snipped and cut and filled her vases. "I do believe your chief interest in life is washing china and making puddings and putting out sheets."

"Do you?" said Luigia, busily wiring a spray of lily of the valley.

"You have plenty of servants to do it," went on Belle, "and I can't think why you wear yourself out over all this housekeeping."

"It is a labour of love," she returned; and rising with the lily of the valley in her hand, she went over to the squire, who was buried behind his newspaper at the other end of the room.

"Rollo," she said, "I am going to present you with this buttonhole, free, gratis, and for nothing. Let me pin it in for you."

"What uncalled for generosity!" he exclaimed, throwing his paper on to the floor and sitting erect with flattering alacrity to be decorated.

She knelt on the floor beside him with a pin in her mouth, and gravely proceeded to arrange the flower in his coat, looking at it sideways to judge of the effect. Little drops of water ran up her bare arms to the elbow and dripped on to the ground.

The squire, while undergoing the operation, sat motionless, looking into her grave, preoccupied face with a tender smile; but when it was finished, and she gave the lapel of his coat a final pat of satisfaction, he lifted those two wet hands and kissed them almost passionately.

"Luigia," he said, regardless of Belle snipping stalks busily at the other end of the room, "do you really love me a little?" and his face and voice were very wistful.

"No," said Luigia, deliberately.

"Not?" And the wistful look changed into one of anxiety and astonishment.

"No," she repeated, planting her two elbows on his knee and her chin in her hands, and thus bringing her eyes on a level with his, "not a little, but a great deal."

The squire's lips trembled.

"An old fellow like me?" he whispered.

"Even an old fellow like you," she whispered back.

"Sometimes I think," he went on, smoothing the hair off her forehead, where it lay soft and fine, like black floss silk, "that you might have had more real happiness and a more real companion if I had left you for a younger man."

"It is wicked to think," she said flippantly, rising as she spoke, "and paves the way to the gallows more surely than anything else."

"But answer me," he persisted, holding her by the skirts as she tried to pass him.

"Yes, yes, yes, then—a thousand times happier," she cried, shaking herself free. "Oh, to think what I have missed!" She threw herself into a tragic attitude and clasped her hands dramatically.

"Luigia——" began the squire, rising with evident designs on her; but she ran away to the other end of the room, and plunging her hands in a basin of water, threatened to drench him if he persisted in asking ridiculous questions or approaching any nearer. He laughed and went off to his study, but no sooner was he gone than the Count made his appearance, evidently at a loss for occupation, and intent on killing time in Luigia's presence. In some moods she might have received him kindly, set him to work on sorting the flowers or filling vases, but this morning he was hustled off the premises with a few peremptory words and a decided frown. He bowed himself away in tragic silence.

"Poor man!" exclaimed Belle, looking after him. "I don't see why he shouldn't have stayed a little while. He doesn't know what on earth to do with himself, one can see."

"It is not my mission in life to provide him with employment," she returned calmly.

"But, of course, he doesn't understand being sent off like that! You never treat him twice alike."

"Why should I?"

"I really don't know," said Belle, dropping her hands into her lap, flowers and all, "whether you are an atrocious flirt, or without an atom of interest in any single man on the face of the earth."

"Must it be one or the other? Well, then, put me down an atrocious flirt, for I certainly feel something more than an atom of interest in a single man. And by the term 'single' do you mean a person who is unmarried?"

"Oh, it is no good talking to you in this mood," said Belle, rising to shake the ends of the cut stalks from her lap into the tray.

"Not the least," she returned serenely, "if you want the truth, since speech is given us for the express purpose of disguising our meaning—at least, so it has always seemed to me."

There were many little things to do in preparation for this dinner-party, and Luigia was more or less busy all day. But with afternoon tea came a cessation of labours, and the banished Count succeeded in effecting an entrance and joining the ladies in the drawing-room. He found the whole house sweet with a profusion of flowers, the rooms swept and garnished and in holiday attire, Luigia's frown banished with her apron, and the hour a leisure one, in which it was pleasant to sit about idly and sip tea. This time she was kind to him, filled his cup as often as he cared to empty it, talked to him sympathetically and gently, and eventually rose to practise the accompaniment of a song he was going to sing in the evening.

"What is the poor fellow to make of her?" thought Belle, watching them in the background. "This morning driving him away like a dog, and now devoting herself to him as though—what? Does she care for him, I wonder? But no—I don't believe she could care for any one or anything really. She only fools them!"

Belle considered dinner-parties a bore, as a rule, but this one she looked forward to with a certain degree of interest.

Sir Ralph was coming—Sir Ralph, whom she had met every day for the last fortnight in one way or another—and his presence at any entertainment, however dull, gave it piquancy. Not that she was in love with him! Oh, no! Belle did not lose her heart except in theory: in practice she knew it was a dangerous and unbusiness-like transaction, and on business she was bent. To-night, as her maid stood brushing out her hair, she lost herself in reflection. Sir Ralph meant business, or might be brought to mean it, if she was skilful and played her cards well; but was he, after all, the best she could manage? It would be easy enough to rid herself of the entanglement with Jean Ingram, if once she made up her mind to do it; but was Sir Ralph all that could be desired in the way of a substitute? What about Lord Egan? He was younger, wealthier, more interesting, had a better manner, a higher title, and was altogether a more eligible man. But then he was reserved, quiet, difficult to win, and had paid her no particular attention. She looked at the fair reflection of her face in the glass. Could not such a face win any man, however cold and indifferent? She smiled confidently in answer to this question, and her maid wondered what direction mademoiselle's thoughts were taking. They were not, she knew well, with her absent lover.

Luigia, ready dressed, was looking through her music when Belle entered the drawing-room, stooping before the cabinet in which her songs were kept. She looked up impatiently.

"So you are ready at last! What ages you and Rollo have been to-night! I thought we should have every one arriving before you were down!"

Belle stared in surprise, for it was a rare thing for Luigia to show signs of ill-humour. But, indeed, to-night she did not look quite like herself. Perhaps it was her dress which was peculiar and unbecoming, or the arrangement of her hair which was different from usual. She inspected her critically. Yes, it was the dress that was in fault -an odd combination of dark-blue shot-silk under black lace, which left the arms and shoulders bare. Her hair, too, was odd—

parted in the middle, brushed back from the temples, and wound round the crown of her head in a mass of neat and shining braids. The whole effect was peculiar, and at first sight Belle did not like it.

"What a strange dress, Luigia!" she exclaimed. "I don't like it half so well as your white silks. Why didn't you wear one of them instead?"

"This is more suitable for to-night. I detest dinner-parties. I didn't want to have it, but Rollo said I must, and so, of course, I gave way."

"I thought you enjoyed arranging the table; you seemed to."

"Oh, that, yes—because it is pretty work, but I dislike the thing itself intensely. I wish I could go to bed and escape it."

She dragged her music on to the floor with a rush, and looked it through with a frown far more formidable than the one with which she had driven the Count away in the morning. Altogether, it was evident that for once her sweet temper had deserted her. She had varied all day in her moods like the most inconsistent of weathercocks.

"But," began Belle, returning to the all-important question of the dress, "that dark-blue and black is such a strange contrast! What made you put them together? I don't think I like it."

"Don't you? I do. It is my thunder-and-lightning dress." She was sweeping through the room, but paused in the centre and turned to face Belle. "Have you ever seen a streak of blue lightning flash through the blackness of a storm? Well, I represent both lightning and storm to-night."

She passed on and seated herself at the piano, the silk of her skirts shimmering as she moved, and alternate gleams of blue and white as cold and mysterious as moonlight. Belle looked after her, repelled and fascinated. Luigia was a creature of moods most certainly, and it was difficult to understand her. An hour ago she had been gentle and willing and reasonable; now, besides her apparent irritability, there was something about her that suggested things

weird, strange, unearthly—blue lights, witches, caverns, mystic charms and potions. The dark shimmering dress was like nothing she had seen any woman wear before.

She looked her over narrowly from top to toe. The little sleek head, with its careful arrangement of plaits, was bent low over the piano—neat, meek, girlish; the low brow was classic and serene. So far so good! But what sort of music was it that those pretty fingers were playing? A fight between devils and angels apparently; a strange mingling of rapture, passion, and despair—at one moment a dizzy whirl of notes rushing breathless in a mad excitement, in the next a crash and a wailing minor chord that came like a dash of cold water right in the listener's face.

After one of these crashes she dropped her hands into her lap and looked across at Belle, smiling.

"Well, what is the result of all this long scrutiny?—that I am horribly cross for no reason? I confess you are not far wrong, and I will try to mend my ways. What shall we talk about that is quite amiable and harmless till our guests arrive?"

At that moment the squire entered, and Luigia looked up to scold him.

"My dear Rollo," she said, "one would think you were a *débutante* off to her first ball, from the amount of prinking you must have done!"

"Have I been longer than usual?" he said mildly, coming forward to pat her shoulder. "You see, we old fellows require to dress with care. We're not so young as we used to be. What a queer way you've done your hair, my lady bird! Didn't Matilda grumble at all those small plaits?"

"No. Do you like it?"

"*Don't I!*" kissing the crown of her head. Then he took her hands, and, pulling her up from the music-stool, looked her over smilingly from head to foot.

The husband and wife stood so for a moment, hand in hand, looking at each other. Luigia saw a man who, in spite of his sixty-three years, was still hale and hearty, brighter, fresher, trimmer than many a boy of twenty. He was well-groomed, too, and even dandified in his attire, a

fact that may be excused him, since he was forty-two years older than his wife. His waistcoat was quite the newest thing out—white *piqué*, sprinkled with tiny pink roses—and the gold chain and seals that hung at his fob were bright as rubbing could make them; his shoes, though square and low-heeled, were polished to the highest degree, and his shirt-front was a snowflake! He, and everything about him, from top to toe, shone and glowed with cleanliness and health, and his face was in itself an advertisement for early rising, vigorous health, and country air. His eye had the brightness of the lark, his cheek the freshness of the morning wind, his hair the powdering of the hoar-frost in early winter, and, if the rose-besprinkled waistcoat were a trifle too capacious, what of that?—did it not cover the very kindest heart in all the world?

He, in his turn, looked at his wife—the girl of twenty-one, with her dark brows and luminous, Southern eyes. He looked into those eyes with a sudden, intense scrutiny, but they met his fully and fearlessly, and whatever idea had been in his mind he instantly dismissed as unworthy.

The vicar and his wife were announced, followed closely by Captain and Mrs. Tremorne, Mr. Andrew Medwin, the author, Major and Mrs Harburton, Miss Watson, and Sir Ralph Bowden. The guests distributed themselves into couples and groups, chatting in subdued voices; the windows were all open, and the last rays of the sunset were coming into the room; it was nearly eight o'clock. A fresh influx of visitors—Lady Meldrum, Lady O'Hagan, Lord Egan, Colonel and Mrs. Frayling, Miss Frayling, Captain Dowie, the Count de Marnay, Colonel King, Lady Margaret Hanope, the bishop and his wife from Tadcaster—the room was filling fast. Eight o'clock struck. One or two late guests arrived with apologies, and dinner was announced. Then the pairing began, and, at the end of the long train, came Luigia with the bishop.

The dinner was long, and probably tedious to those who were paired with the wrong people, but the squire's end of the table was lively enough, and Luigia and her bishop knew no weariness. She devoted herself almost exclusively

to him, playing off her airs and graces, and doing her very best to turn his head—solemn, formal, and pompous though it was. She was in unusually high spirits, it seemed; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes brilliant, her lips for ever smiling; she was bewildering, odd, graceful, unexpected in all she said and did, coquetting with him in a dozen different ways, yet so delicately that no one could have accused her of deliberate flirtation. She flew to his head like strong wine; she intoxicated him with her smiles, she drowned him in fascinations he had no time to analyze, she scorched him with the malice of her tongue, and melted him with the beauty of her eyes, and, before the first five minutes were over, he had forgotten the wife of his bosom, the Sunday sermon, his cathedral, his churchmen, his admiring friends, and sunk, for the time being, into a frail and faulty man, as easily swayed as the rest of them. He left the Manor that night with a guilty feeling somewhere about him that he had been indulging in forbidden things, and behaving as bishops do not generally behave—a feeling that was not contradicted by his wife's manner to him during the drive home.

Lord Egan, meanwhile, did not find it in his heart to flirt with that lady as Luigia was flirting with her husband. He remarked on the beauty of the sunset, and the unusual mildness of the spring that year, and then, seeing her claimed by her companion on the other side, subsided thankfully into silence in the shelter of her bony shoulders. Later on, he was led away into a promise of twenty pounds towards the new soup-kitchen, and a vague assent to the demand that he would be *sure* and come to the bazaar for the cottage hospital they were getting up. If he was in England at the time, he said, he should make a point of coming, but his arrangements were uncertain. He might be off to-morrow, for all he knew. Did he find that wandering, aimless sort of life satisfactory, asked the lady, feeling it a sad thing that this young man, with so much money and so much time at his disposal, should waste both on tiger-hunting. No, he did not find it particularly satisfactory, he replied, but it seemed to him as good as any other that it

was in his power to lead. Politics? Land and tenants? Parochial matters? No, they none of them interested him in the least; he much preferred shooting big game, and wandering over the earth with no purpose in life beyond killing time and satisfying the impulse of the moment. But how could he possibly reconcile such a mode of existence to his conscience? He *didn't* reconcile it to his conscience; he hadn't even tried, in fact—if it came to that, he wasn't sure that he had a conscience at all. The bishop's wife looked scandalized at such a wild way of talking, and Lord Egan laughed, and was allowed to relapse into silence.

It is true that he was not interested in agriculture and politics and the various legitimate forms of occupation that fall to the share of a young man in his position, and that he was sadly wanting in all serious aims in life. He lived for the moment always—whether it was tracking a wild beast's footprints across the sands of Africa, or whether it was —what? Every now and then he leaned back in his chair, and gave himself up to the contemplation of a woman's face. It was a dangerous face—dangerous in its smiling allurement, its soft appeal, its cruel mockery. It was irresistibly bewitching to watch, but what was there behind it? Could she care herself—she who sent men mad for her sake? Not by so much as the dressing of her hair, or the arranging of the roses at her breast! He took up the menu-card, twisted it in his hand, wrenched off its corner, and tossed it away again. It was an intense relief to him, physical as well as mental, when the ladies rose, left the room, and the door closed behind them. He flung himself down again in his chair, and Sir Ralph moved up nearer him.

"Fine lookin' girl, that Miss Carmichael," he began. "She ought to marry well. She'd do a man credit. Look well on horseback too. What's that—Burgundy?"

Lord Egan pushed him over the decanter without replying.

"Yes, she's a stylish young woman," he continued, examining the cigar offered for his inspection with deliberation. "Fine eyes; but she hasn't got the 'go' about her of

Mrs. Rodney. I'd back Mrs. Rodney to beat her in any race you like to set 'em, whether it's a race for men's hearts or a race to the devil. There'd be no half-measures about *her* if she once set off."

"Think so?" muttered Lord Egan, absorbed in the business of lighting his cigarette.

"Sure of it. By Jove! she's a dangerous creature!" — with a chuckle. Then, lowering his voice confidentially, "She won't spend her life tied to the old man's side. She's not made of stuff that will lie quiet for ever. Did you notice how she turned old devil-dodger's head to-night?" winking over his shoulder to indicate the bishop.

"No," said Lord Egan.

Sir Ralph threw himself back in his chair, and crossed his legs.

"You take my word for it, she'll go off one of these days and take a friend with her. And when it comes to pass, the old man will feel as if an earthquake had occurred without warning. Funny thing, that—with the shocks and rumblings going on around him all the time."

"Very," said Lord Egan, looking as absolutely uninterested as a man can well look, and, getting up, he walked round the table to return the squire his cigarette case.

Coffee was served in the drawing-room, which was softly lighted by wax candles. The windows were open, and the night air was blowing in fresh and cool. When the gentlemen entered Luigia was surrounded immediately, and the quiet, subdued manner in which she had been talking to Lady Meldrum changed into languor and brilliance. She had a singular power of combining these two things; her voice, her movements, the lifting of her lashes were languid in the extreme, but the words that fell from her lips, and the flash in the eyes themselves, were often hard and dazzling. More than one pair of eyes watched her that evening with an observation that was curious, admiring, doubtful.

Music was suggested, and there was a request that Luigia should sing. She came forward at once, and Belle rose to

play her accompaniment, causing general commotion among the gentlemen in the neighbourhood of the piano.

She sang a rapid, rushing, brilliant thing, like all the birds of the air racing in song. Her voice was clearer and truer than ever, but there was a dashing vivacity in her management of it that produced an impression of something like recklessness and bravado. All eyes were upon her, but she did not care. She stood alone in the centre of the room, in the strange, dark, gleaming gown that shimmered with the hues of summer lightning as she moved. There was a brilliance almost as hard and dazzling in her eyes. When the song was ended a murmur of applause ran through the room.

"Thanks, dear Mrs. Rodney—a most exquisite thing!" murmured Mrs. Frayling sentimentally; "but haven't you something softer and sadder? I always like your *pathetic* songs so much!"

"I am afraid I could not do justice to pathos to-night," said Luigia. "There are times, you know, when one could laugh in the face of despair—and even of death itself, if it had the hardihood to assail one."

She lifted her fan, tied to her waist by long black ribbons, and opened it slowly. She did indeed look a brilliant figure, capable, as she said, of defying even death itself should it come near her.

"You are *sans pitié* to-night, madame," whispered the Count de Marnay in her ear. "I see it in your eyes, I hear it in your voice."

"From you, my dear Count," she replied over her fan, "I can hope to conceal nothing. I do not deny that you are right."

A new performer was pressed into service at the piano, and Luigia retreated to a distant couch and comparative obscurity. The Count followed her.

"There is something about Mrs. Rodney that is quite incomprehensible," said Mrs. Tremorne to the man at her side, as she watched her husband making his way to Luigia's corner by a series of circuits calculated to throw the public off the scent. "I cannot see that she is particularly

pretty, and yet she seems to turn the head of every man she comes across."

She was a bride of three months' standing, and resented her husband's circuitous wanderings.

"There is something more dangerous than beauty—that even the plainest woman may have," replied the man of the world.

"Do you call her *plain?*" cried Mrs. Tremorne, hopefully.

He smiled. "Not exactly! No. But she has the power of fascination, I should say, judging from the little I know of her."

"What is fascination?" fidgeting nervously with her fan. "I mean, what makes fascination?"

The man of the world reflected before he spoke. If he had answered truly he would have said, "Fascination takes many forms, but perhaps the most fatal lies in the hand of a woman who possesses an unlimited desire for conquest, a passionate nature, and an empty heart. In her own unhappiness she has little mercy upon others. She has much to give, but cannot give it easily; she longs to love and she plays with her victims in the vague hope that one of them may chance to take her heart captive." But instead he merely said—"Pretty manners and pretty clothes."

"Do you call her dress *pretty?*" cried the poor little bride. "*I* think it is perfectly hideous."

At that moment Captain Tremorne sank on to the couch at Luigia's disengaged side, and the man of the world saw at a glance the drift of the whole discussion. He was a little sorry then, perhaps, that he had not taken another line, but he, like the rest of the world, had been deluded by the system of circuits, and had not imagined till that moment that Mrs. Rodney had flung her spell over his companion's young husband.

Later on Luigia was asked to sing again, by special request. As the first few bars of the accompaniment were being played, Lord Egan, who was standing near the piano, turned deliberately, and went through into the ante-room, and was lost to sight. It was a marked thing to do, and

almost rude, since Belle had just intimated to him that she hoped he was good at turning music, as poor Captain Tremorne had made such a muddle last time! He had given some sort of indistinct reply, and almost immediately afterwards left the room.

Luigia was perfectly aware of what had happened, and directly the song was finished she swept the room with a comprehensive glance. Lady Margaret Hanope was missing as well as Lord Egan. Of course he had gone in there after her! In a moment she had laid her plans.

She turned to Mr. Medwin, the author. Was he fond of pictures? She had heard so. Did he care to see the one by Sir Thomas Lawrence in the other room? Oh, no trouble at all; she would show it him if he would follow her. The Count, although he knew the picture well, came too; he was interested in art, and anxious to hear Mr. Medwin's opinion of the picture.

The ante-room was comparatively dark, being lighted only by fairy lights placed in banks of moss along the mantelpiece. In one corner, on a big couch, sat Sir Ralph and Lady Margaret in the thick of a flirtation, talking together in low voices; in the window—a long French window open down to the ground—stood Lord Egan alone, leaning with folded arms against the wall looking out on to the moonlit lawn. He turned as the raiding party entered, but Luigia was looking past him with preoccupied eyes at a picture hanging on the wall. She swept across the room, with the cold moonlight bringing out the hues of the storm dress as she passed through its rays.

"This is it," she said, taking one of the fairy lamps from its bed of moss, and holding it close to the picture. "It is the portrait of a great uncle of my husband's."

Medwin and the Count came forward to examine it. The light was thrown on to an oil painting of a youth with dreamy, amorous eyes, and a sentimental lock of hair sweeping across his brow.

"I do not admire him myself," she said. "His story, too, is foolish. He fell in love with a woman double his age, and cut his throat because she laughed at him."

"Pauvre malheureux!" murmured the Count, relieving her of the lamp. Sir Ralph and Lady Margaret rose, glanced at the picture, and sauntered into the other room.

"Oh, no doubt he deserved his fate," she said with a careless shrug of the shoulders. "People who train their hair into their eyes like that had better cut their throats, and have done with it."

"You have not much sympathy with the victims of an unhappy attachment apparently," said Medwin, smiling.

"Not much," she replied. "They are, of course, mad, and disease is never very interesting."

She turned back, and the Count, replacing the fairy lamp, went forward to pull aside the curtain. There, however, he was caught and secured by Miss Flora Watson, who was lying in wait for him; and he found himself pinioned to her side. Medwin stayed to accompany Luigia.

As she passed Lord Egan, who was still standing apart in the moonlit window, her bracelet dropped with a crash to the ground. He stooped forward, picked it up, and returned it to her silently. Medwin paused, intending to wait while she put it on again; but, after one glance at Lord Egan's face, being the man of the world that he was, he changed his intention, and quietly stepping through the curtained doorway, disappeared into the farther room. Luigia and Lord Egan were left alone.

The bracelet was a tiny string of diamonds, fastened with a gold clasp. It had never dropped like that before; but, of course, Lord Egan did not know that; and women have many little ways of bringing about what they wish. She stood now pushing the soft, loose glove down from her arm, and trying to make the snap meet; but, as all the world knows, it is a difficult thing to fasten a bracelet with one hand only—she struggled in vain. He stood by meanwhile without offering assistance.

"Would you mind doing it for me?" she said at last; and it seemed to him that her voice was full of a new and beautiful softness.

He tried to be deaf to it; he knew that it was only a trick. She had not spoken to him the whole evening, and

this sudden encounter was quite enough in itself to set his pulses throbbing madly. It needed no additional provocations to add to the excitement of the situation. He took the bracelet, put it round her wrist, and fastened it without once looking in her face.

"Thank you," she said, still standing there, even when it was done. Then, after a moment's pause, "Why did you come in here all alone?"

"Am I wanted for anything?"

"No—not particularly. Do you know"—pulling up the long glove under the bracelet—"that I have been rather anxious about you lately; you talked so horribly the other day—do you remember?"

"No."

"Well, you did. I have been imagining damp ponds and cold poison ever since. I was quite relieved when I saw you in church on Sunday, and again when you turned up to-night."

"It is very good of you to say so," he returned stiffly. There was still that softness in her voice that he was trying not to hear, not to believe in, not to feel.

"Not good at all," she answered; "it is only the truth."

He looked up at her for the first time, and met her eyes. In them he saw the same beautiful softness that he had heard in her voice; she was looking at him with her head thrown back a little, and her lips parted. He fancied—but men in love are blind and deaf and stupid, and he did not believe the evidence of his senses. He spoke more coldly and stiffly than before. "I am afraid my credulity will not carry me quite so far as that," he said, "but I am, of course, sensible of the honour you do me in expressing your concern for me." And with this grand speech he held aside the curtain for her to pass through.

Andrew Medwin saw them enter, Luigia, with unconscious eyes, sweeping up the room like a tragedy queen, Lord Egan behind pale, calm, composed. It was his trade to study human nature, and he did not fail to make his observations on the point in question.

"That is a bad case," he said to himself as he glanced from one face to the other. "He shows it more than she does, but she—*did not drop her bracelet for nothing!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

DISCONTENT.

"How I wish I were a haymaker!" exclaimed Luigia, half to herself, half to Ingram, leaning her arms on the top of a cross-barred gate, and looking into the field where the haymakers were piling their last load of hay.

Ingram and she were on their way home after a ramble on the hills near the Manor House. He was paying a flying visit to Rodney to satisfy himself that the country air agreed with Belle, but Belle, unfortunately, was out driving with Mrs. Harburton, and he had been thrown for the afternoon on Luigia's hands. She had taken him for a walk, a rambling, aimless walk, for no other reason than to feel the sun beating down upon their heads, and to have their ears filled with the songs of birds.

"How I should like to wear a pink cotton jacket and a big sun-bonnet!" she continued, poking up the hay through the bars of the gate with her closed parasol. "How nice to get up early when everything is fresh, and the dew is on the grass, and go out to work in the fields in the sunshine! And how nice to come back at night to a thatched cottage, and lie down, tired out with hard work, and sleep right away through the night without waking! How easy to be good in such a life!"

"You forget the drunken husband battering you over the head with his boots, and half a dozen screaming children, with dirty faces, tearing at your skirts all day long."

"Why spoil my picture? Besides, if I were a haymaker I should not marry. I should be quite contented with my hard work and my hay."

"The haymaking season lasts about a fortnight in the

year—or, to give a wide margin, let us say a month. How would you employ yourself the other eleven months? Sit in your thatched cottage doing nothing?"

"Of course not. I should milk cows and feed chickens and spin linen. Anyway, I should be too simple to waste my time in longing after things I can never have."

"Pardon me. If you belonged to the thatched cottage you would set your affections on a green glass necklace you had seen at a fair, or, they might even take the form of *beer*, who knows? The ladies of that class have been known now and then to indulge a little too freely in that species of entertainment."

"Well, perhaps you are right," she replied, not in the least disconcerted by his realism. "We are all eating our hearts out in longings of one kind or another, I suppose, and whether it takes the form of beer, or conversion of Blacks, or a million of money, it all comes to the same thing in the end."

"Precisely!"

"Still, it must be a good thing to be doing the work of the world—actual, manual labour, using all the strength of one's body every day of one's life. I should like to tire myself out till my back ached and my hands were sore. It might cure me."

"Cure you of what?"

"Oh, I don't know,"—swinging her parasol idly backwards and forwards. "Civilized life is such a farce! I am so tired of it all—tired to death!"

"Tired of what?"

"Oh, the everyday round—dressing and smiling and pretending, and smothering my real self till I feel like some wild creature that is put into a cage and supposed to be tame. They come and look at me, and I have to go through my pretty tricks as though I liked it, and they give me sugar and stroke my head and go away again quite satisfied with their captive. And all the time I hate sugar and hate cages, and I would rather go and burrow in the dampest, coldest earth, and live on what wild nuts I could find, so long as I was free."

"Your animal," said Ingram, sarcastically, "I do not know. Still, you have made your meaning clear, which, perhaps, is the chief point."

"My animal," said Luigia, "is myself, and I do not think you or anybody else knows much about it."

She poked up a weed with her parasol, and prodded it into the earth again.

"The worst of it is," she added, after a pause, "that I do not understand the species myself, or what it needs to make it happy. The cage and the sugar are failures, and I am not quite sure that the cold, damp earth would satisfy it, although sometimes that form of retirement appeals to me strongly." She turned with a smile to meet his eyes. "Can you suggest any sort of existence suited to the most restless of creatures?"

He folded his arms on the top of the gate and looked into the hayfield too.

"If the restless little animal were mine," he said, "I would make its cage so pleasant to it that it wouldn't want to run away."

She shook her head.

"I think somehow the limits of the cage would always be too narrow. When first I married, I had an insatiable thirst to go farther and see more, and we went wherever I chose, and saw all there was to be seen. And I grew tired of it—desperately tired of it."

"Naturally."

"Yes, I suppose that was natural enough. The constant change and excitement were a weariness I cannot express. I begged him to bring me home."

"Are you happier?"

"No. There is the difficulty! I am tired of rest and quiet and all these peaceable hills. It seems that nothing contents me. What in the world am I to do with myself and this terrible overwhelming restlessness?"

He was looking at her with much the same keen, critical interest in his eyes as that with which he was wont to regard the slow changes in his chemical experiments.

"Sometimes," she went on, "I think that work would

cure it. When I see horses straining up a hill with a heavy load behind them, I long to go and put myself between the shafts and pull too. I should like to drag and drag till I dropped down exhausted and lost my senses at the top of the hill. Do you know the feeling?"

"I cannot say I have exactly pined to drag a cartload of bricks up a steep hill. But never mind, go on, I can understand."

"You think I am exaggerating, but I am not. Sometimes I feel I must run away—anywhere—over those purple hills and into the country beyond where I could breathe and be free."

She took off her hat and fanned herself with it.

"There is no air here," she exclaimed impatiently; "I wish the wind would come. Oh!"—lifting her face with a tragic gesture—"if only the wind would come and take me away with it over the sea somewhere—to the land where the citron blows, or away into space for ever and ever!"

She leaned her arms upon the gate again, and a country girl in a pink cotton frock, tossing hay in a far-off corner, wondered why the courting of ladies and gentlemen was so different from that of her own people. Why did he not put his arm round her waist and kiss her boldly in the face of the whole world, instead of only looking at her?

There was a silence between the two at the gate, and only the voices of the haymakers and the trill of the blackbirds in the copse could be heard. Luigia was looking away to the sunset, where the sky glowed with airy golden clouds floating in a sea of red.

"But even if the wind came at my desire and carried me away with it over the sea, right out to the sunset," she said presently, speaking in the fantastic strain that seemed best to express her thought, "do you think I should be satisfied? I don't. I have been into the enchanted lands, and found them no nearer paradise than my hills and valleys here. And I think after all it is something unattainable that I long for—like the desire of the moth for the star—too high to be reached."

"The plain English of all this is that you are a most dis-

contented woman," said Ingram. "It is the same feeling that makes the workingman cry 'I want more beer'—only you express yourself in a prettier manner."

She was silent.

"We all want more beer—or more air, as you call it, but the heavens don't open and rain down beer in answer to our shouts, and the air we have is a poor apology for air—a thin, vaporous, evil-smelling stuff that turns us sick as we breathe it. But what of that? We shall never know any other, and must live and die in it as it is."

"That is a hard doctrine."

"Most truths are hard."

She looked away to the hills, with a discontented little frown.

"I wish I could drown myself," she said presently—"not in a pond, but in an ideal or a feeling. I am sick of my own individuality; it follows me like a ghost wherever I go. I envy those people who have something to live for and no time to think. I wish I had gone in for music—professionally I mean—and slaved away at it night and day, and thought of nothing else. Oh!"—with a sudden change of voice—"it would be grand! I can imagine it—singing away the souls and senses of the people who came to hear me! That would be something to live for—something satisfying!"

"You think so because you can't have it." He looked away to the hills with a shadow on his face that had in it a tinge of sadness. "But there is a canker at the core of everything—everything."

"At any rate, some things are more rotten than others. The artistic life is absorbing, it is ideal, it is passionate. I would give all commonplace peace and security just to live—to use what is in me instead of lying by to rust. Is it possible"—with a scornful curl of the lip—"to throw one's whole heart and soul into sewing on buttons and ordering the dinner?"

"It depends upon the size of the soul. I have known people do it."

"Oh, not *people*. *I* am made of flesh and blood, and I

want to *live*. Sometimes, as I sit in my pretty room sewing buttons on Rollo's waistcoat—or any other prosaic little wifely duty you like to think of—I look up and across to those mountains, and think of the hot, busy towns down on the other side, where the people are struggling and panting and working their lives away, and I envy them! Yes, I envy them frantically! I would exchange my pretty shaded rooms, with all their flowers and refinement, for the barest attic where I had to stitch and stitch away all day for dear life—anything to wear myself out—anything!"

"You pretty, discontented creature!" he remarked, looking at her with a half-scornful smile, "you want a few real aches and pains to occupy you. If, for instance, you married that haymaker with the heavy boots we mentioned just now, and he knocked you over the head with the poker now and then, you would develop immediately into a woman with an object in life."

"The object being——?"

"To preserve the family bones intact; to scrub, patch, and mend your belongings, hide the poker, and present a respectable window with a lace curtain and a potted geranium to the public eye. That and other small items would employ about as much time and energy as would ever be likely to be placed at your disposal."

"Not a bad idea! And the half-dozen screaming children would absolutely delight me! But, as I found out long ago, one is not given one's desire in this world—and no amount of prayers will convert Rollo into a brutal haymaker with heavy boots."

"It is a pity!" he assented; "but so many things are a pity, that it is scarcely worth while commenting on them."

The haycart was loaded now, and came rumbling over the field towards the gate on which they were leaning. They moved aside, and Ingram opened it to let the waggon pass. There was a group of shouting children following in its shadow, and he and Luigia watched it jolting down the steep lane to the village in the valley.

"Yes, I *do* wish I were a haymaker," she exclaimed

again, more emphatically than before—"little as you may believe it."

"Oh, I believe it," he returned contemptuously; "women have no method in their madness. And you are mad, Luigia—quite mad!"

He folded his arms again on the gate as it swung to, and looked into her face with cool effrontery. His eyes were smiling, but his lips were drawn into a thin, tight line—the line of contempt.

"What do you mean?" she demanded indignantly.

"Do you think I don't know—I, who have studied every phase of man in every phase of his vagaries—do you think I don't know when a woman is in love?"

A burning flush dyed Luigia's face crimson. After a moment of mingled surprise and anger she lifted her head defiantly.

"How dare you say so to me, a married woman!"

"Oh, I would dare anything," he returned, laughing—"a great deal more than that, if it came to the point. I'm not a scrap afraid of flashing eyes. I like them! Flash away—it is both amusing and becoming."

"Let us go home," she said, opening her parasol almost in his laughing face. "Indeed, Mr. Ingram, though I am not bound to defend myself at all, I can tell you that you are entirely wrong."

"Indeed? Then all that burning desire to be a work-girl stitching the flesh off your finger bones is only a natural inclination to make a shirt. I apologize for my mistake."

He caught her eye accidentally as he said this, and there was both fear and anxiety in it.

"Is it fair to joke about such things?" she said proudly.

"Joke? I am not joking. I know you are about as far gone as the human creature ever goes; you have collapsed entirely. But don't mind me. I have seen dozens of men and women—principally women, to be strictly truthful—in the same condition."

Again that burning blush and a swift glance of still greater dread. He stopped in the middle of the road and burst out laughing.

"Don't look so scared. I am not going to write an anonymous note to the squire. You can go on collapsing as much as you like, without let or hindrance from me. It amuses you, I dare say, and that is a great point."

"You are horrible, Jean! Do you think it is nothing to accuse a married woman of——"

"Of falling in love with somebody who isn't her husband? No, my dear child, I think nothing of it at all; it is quite the most natural thing in the world."

"And the marriage tie——"

"Is an extremely inconvenient restriction which civilization has brought in its train. I think nothing of that either —nothing."

He sauntered at her side with a cool, imperturbable smile on his lips. She looked at him several times covertly in silence.

"The world is a chaos," he continued presently, with his eyes on the dust—"a chaos without meaning. It is a rather unpleasant chaos for most people. The wise man says, 'I will enjoy what I can, whether right or wrong. Who says that there is wrong? The law of God is a myth; we have created it out of our own inner consciousness, and it is greatly in the way. I will live without it.'"

She stopped suddenly in the middle of the dusty road and faced him impetuously.

"Suppose you are right. Suppose we fling away our happiness from a mistaken sense of duty, and that death is an end of everything—oh, it is quite likely, more than likely —and *then* what shall we be? Nothing but dust and ashes, that have lived in vain. In vain, I say," she added passionately, "for all this senseless round of eating, talking, sleeping *is* in vain without the one great thing that makes it worth the doing."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't look at me as though I were an oracle to decide your fate. I profess no theories of life. I have settled down to the chaos myself, but that is no reason why you should do the same; and, for all I know, there may be a commander-in-chief at the head of affairs, and a set of hard-

and-fast rules to catch us tripping at every turn. I am always open to conviction, if ever the commander-in-chief takes the trouble to convince me."

They walked home almost in silence. As they reached the house and the garden-door, she paused a moment on the shallow step.

"After all, I do not believe there is any real satisfaction to be gained from living for pleasure," she said, turning to him. "There is something in us that will not be content with anything short of God. I know it—I am sure of it, and yet it makes no difference. The things of this world are so near and so dear, and we chase them desperately. But they are only phantoms all the while."

"Your wisdom is of such a lofty nature that I cannot attempt to follow it," he replied ironically, "neither do I wish to. I prefer oyster patés to palms and crowns."

"You may like oyster patés," she returned gravely, "but they do not give you *happiness*, neither does wealth, neither does love, I suppose. No, there lies the secret of the world. Man's heart longs for the high and the unattainable, and will not be satisfied with anything less. It is the desire of the moth for the star, and because the star is too high and it must have light, it dashes headlong into the flame and is burnt. But it is the star that it longs for all the time—the beautiful, unattainable star of heaven."

For a moment there was the light of something like inspiration in her face, but she did not give him time to criticise it before she turned away to enter the house.

"What an ancestry hers must have been!" he exclaimed to himself as he followed her through the hall, "to judge by the inheritance it has bequeathed her. Saints and devils and voluptuous women all making her their battleground and fighting for the mastery. And the worst of it is, one never knows who will speak next—the saintly grandfather or the devilish uncle. The saint or the devil alone one could tackle, but a combination of the two presents difficulties that no ordinary mortal can be expected to overcome."

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE ABBEY.

In the hot, still afternoons the Manor House was very silent. Luigia—well, Luigia was always busy, and Belle lay alone on the drawing-room couch pretending to read. But who could read in such weather? The book, let it be the most thrilling romance imaginable, would slip to the ground, the hot foot would drop its slipper, the flushed face impatiently seek a cooler spot on its fresh white muslin cushion. Then, with windows and doors wide open, how was it possible to prevent straying eyes? To lie there and look out was sufficient exertion for anybody, sufficient excuse for the most absolute idleness. The shadow on the grass, the whirling rook, the fluttering vine-leaf was each in itself an episode; so was the stirring of the window curtain near at hand, and the floating in and out of a capricious-minded bee, who could settle to nothing, and when in the garden longed for the tranquillity of the house, and when in the house sought wildly for an outlet into the garden.

Belle, lying there alone one afternoon, grew impatient of the stillness and went in search of Luigia. She flung aside her book, put on the discarded slipper, and peeped into the rooms, one after another. But they were empty, silent, with drawn blinds. On the upper floor it was the same: the bedrooms, white and cool, were empty too. Then she called her name, and far away in the upper regions came an answer. She climbed to the top floor—a rambling, deserted place in the roof—and there in the apple-room she found her.

It was called the apple-room, because from time immemorial it had borne that name, but in reality it was devoted quite as much to the storing of jam, pickles, honey, flower seeds, and drying herbs. It was a large whitewashed attic, with square casement windows, opening on the tree-tops, where in the spring the rooks built their nests. From the walls dangled bunches of lavender and herbs; the floor was

spread with newspapers covered with rose-leaves drying in the sun; near a wide-open cupboard stood an array of neatly covered jam-pots; and in their midst was Luigia enveloped in a great white apron, with rolled-up sleeves.

"You slave!" ejaculated Belle, as she appeared in the doorway. "What can possibly drive you to work like a nigger on a day like this?"

"My conscience," returned Luigia.

"I want your advice on a very serious matter," she continued, picking her way across the room to the solitary rush-bottomed chair in the centre. "Shall I wait till you have put away all that jam?"

"Oh, I can attend."

"Well, then, to come to the point without beating about the bush: Sir Ralph *almost* proposed to me last night, only I stopped him, and I don't know what to do. Would you let him come to the point, if you were me?"

"I thought you were engaged to Jean?"

"Oh, that's only in a sort of a way, don't you know. I don't consider it very binding, and he has often offered to release me, and I know he would in a minute, if I wished it."

"Then what is your dilemma? Throw over Jean and accept Sir Ralph at once."

"Do you really mean that?"—eagerly.

"Certainly. Is he not far richer?"

"Oh, but that is such a very mercenary way of looking at things."

"A little, perhaps. But still, if a rich husband would make you happier than a poor one, why not take him?"

Belle watched Luigia arranging the neat white rows of jam-pots in the cupboard in silence.

"The foolish and tiresome part of it is," she said at last, "that I like Jean better than Sir Ralph."

Luigia looked round at her with a little smile.

"I should get rid of that idea," she said, "for it is only an idea, you know, and such an inconvenient one! It is ridiculous to let a feeble little liking stand between you and the realities of rank and fortune."

"Do you really advise me to have him?"

"I do—or, if you have the chance, some one richer and greater."

"Luigia, how horribly worldly you are!"

"Do I shock you? But it is no good blinking matters. You come to me for advice, and I give it honestly. If you would not give everything you possess in the world just to have the right to mend Jean's old coat, you had better not choose poverty with him. There are women who would prefer the old coat and the mending of it to anything else you could give them; who would laugh in your face if you offered them money in exchange; but no sensible people, of course, would allow their feelings to run away with them in such a manner."

Belle reflected on the matter. Then, after a pause—

"Do you really think I should be happy with Sir Ralph?" she said.

"Oh, I am not so presumptuous! Happiness is a phantom we mostly chase in vain. But I certainly believe your chances of it are greater with Sir Ralph than they would ever be with Jean."

Another long pause.

"I'll write to Jean, then, and break it off," she said at last; "it really would be best, I feel sure. But I do hope the poor fellow won't take it dreadfully to heart. I should not like to hurt him."

"I don't think you need be afraid."

"He is very fond of me," she cried in an offended manner.

"Oh, very—of course."

Luigia went on working busily, while Belle reflected on the subject of her lovers. The rooks were cawing in the tree-tops near the window, a slanting ray of sunshine streamed across the drying rose-leaves on to Belle's pale muslin gown.

There was the sound of horse's footsteps on the hard dry road that skirted that side of the house, and Belle rose rather eagerly to view the rider.

"Why, it is Lord Egan!" she exclaimed in an animated voice.

"Is it?" returned Luigia, indifferently.

"Yes, and—why, he is turning in here! What can he be coming for? Just a call, do you think, or is it about seeing the pictures, I wonder? I always said Lady Meldrum wouldn't remember, but now perhaps she has. Do come down. I am quite moped with reading so long."

The clang of the door-bell rang through the house.

"I'll come in a minute," said Luigia, who had not even turned round to drink in the exciting news. "Go and entertain him till I am ready."

"You needn't change your dress."

"No, but I must get rid of this apron. Go. I won't be long."

Belle, nothing loth, left the attic and ran downstairs to receive the visitor, and Luigia went on arranging her cupboard mechanically as long as her footsteps could be heard. When she was really sure of being alone, she lifted her head and stood erect on the floor where before she had been stooping. She was deadly pale, and as breathless as if she had been running hard.

"How can I go down like this?" she exclaimed. "What is the matter with me?"

She walked over to a small bit of broken mirror hanging on the wall, and looked at her reflection in it with fierce scorn.

"What a face!" she cried. "What a tale it tells in every line of it! Oh, what do I mean by it—what do I mean by it?"

She began to pace the attic rapidly from end to end, scattering the drying rose-leaves right and left with her skirts as she passed. She had placed them there herself very carefully a day or two before, but now they and their fate were nothing to her. She was storming and railing against herself inwardly—fiercely resenting the emotions that had possession of her. She could not go down to face this man because her heart was beating too fast to let her speak coherently; her pale lips were trembling, and her hands, the hands she clenched, were trembling too. She went down to

her own room and locked the door between herself and the world.

"This is degradation!" she cried furiously. "Oh, why can I not stamp it out and trample it under foot as I wish? Why is it to rule me and have dominion over me till I become a miserable, trembling object unable to look any one in the face? Why can I not go down and behave like a rational being?"

But she did not attempt the going down and behaving like a rational being. She stood at the window and waited till Lord Egan rode away, when she watched him from the shadow of the curtain. She saw him ride slowly past the garden wall in the road outside, the slanting rays of the afternoon sunshine turning his horse's glossy flanks to satin and lighting the stirrup with a dazzling spark of fire. She watched both horse and rider out of sight, straining her ears to catch the last echo of the horse's footsteps; and when both were gone, she dropped her head on to her arms and hid her face.

"I am very wicked—desperately wicked!" she said in her heart; "but it is no good—I cannot struggle against it. It is too strong for me—it is as strong as death. It is wicked and degrading, but there is nothing else in the whole world I care for."

A moment later Belle came tapping at the locked door. "Why didn't you come down? We waited ever so long. He brought a note from Lady Meldrum asking us there to-morrow. Why didn't you come?"

"I—spilt some jam on my dress, and had to change it," said Luigia from within, "and then—he was gone."

"What a nuisance! Well, he wouldn't wait, of course, and I didn't like to insist on keeping him. He looked so nice this afternoon—particularly good-looking, I thought. Ta, ta; I'm going to write my letter."

"Now he has made me tell a lie!" cried Luigia to herself, more furiously than ever, and she stamped her foot. "There is no end to the degradation he puts me to! Change my dress, indeed! Well, now I shall have to do it, just to prove my words;" and with the rapid, vehement move-

ments of excitement, she took off the gown she wore and rang for her maid to arrange her hair afresh.

It was dusk before Belle saw her again, and dinner was being laid. She had written her letter to Jean, and told Luigia so as she came into the room.

"So you really mean to do it?" said Luigia, with a slight smile. "My suggestion about the old coat did not tempt you? You prefer that there should be servants to do that sort of thing. You are perfectly right."

"You really do think so?"

"Oh, beyond a doubt. If you preferred poverty and old coats and things of that sort for a man's sake, you would love him, and love means suffering, and suffering is sometimes almost unbearable." She turned away to light the candles. "Steer clear of love, whatever other foolishness you may fall into."

"Oh, love is very romantic, and very beautiful; and I'm sure I'm the last person not to see all that; but, really, when it means poverty, squalor, and turned dresses, I'm sure I shouldn't be able to endure it. It would kill me, I'm certain."

"Oh, people don't die as easily as you imagine! And sometimes," she added, turning round with the flare of the lighted candle illuminating her pale face, "I almost think God likes to torture us just for the pleasure of seeing us writhe. Of course it is wicked to say so, but there are a great many wicked things in the world that are true."

Belle was duly shocked at such outspoken heresy, and pursing her lips with an air of disapproval, sealed her letter and took it to the post-bag in the hall.

The next day Luigia and Belle went up to lunch at the Abbey, after which they were to go through the picture-gallery for Miss Carmichael's special edification. On arriving there just before two o'clock, they found that Lady Meldrum had collected quite a little party of those who "did so love pictures," and that the morning-room was packed with people. There were Mrs. Frayling and her daughter, and Mrs. Harburton, and Miss Flora Watson, and the Count and Captain Douglas, the latter of whom had

lately contracted a habit of dropping in at the Abbey at all recognized and unrecognized hours. Lastly, there was old Colonel King, who, as a distant cousin to the house of Egan, had volunteered his services as showman.

The guests were assembling round the luncheon-table in the long, sunny dining-room, when Lord Egan and Lady Margaret Hanope made their appearance together at one of the open windows leading into the gardens. She was in her riding-habit, and entering without ceremony, nodded all round and sank into the chair reserved for her, with the air of an *intime* of the house.

"Quite a settled thing, I suppose?" whispered Mrs. Frayling to Luigia across Lord Egan's empty place, indicating the couple with a faint movement of the head. "Is it given out yet?"

"I have not heard so," returned Luigia, sinking languidly into her chair, "though I sometimes feel inclined to offer my congratulations."

"Isn't it terribly hot, my dear?" said Lady Meldrum, addressing the heiress in her most maternal manner; "and with no parasol too!"

"Like an oven!" ejaculated Lady Margaret, throwing her whip on to a side chair. "We've been watching them break in the Irish mare. Such sport! She threw him twice, the little devil? I wanted to try her myself, but *he*"—with a careless nod towards Lord Egan—"wouldn't let me. I bet you she wouldn't have disposed of *me* quite so easily."

Luigia trifled with the things on her plate, and sent them away almost untasted. The Count, who sat before her, was greatly concerned. What was the matter?

Oh, it was so hot—too hot to eat—and she had a headache. Bad? Well, yes, it was rather bad. Would she let him take her home—he could manage it quite quietly, without any fuss? What an idea! Certainly not; headaches were nothing; they only made one rather pale. Did she feel faint? Not in the least; she never made an exhibition of herself in that way. And would he pass the water, please.

After lunch came the picture-gallery, and the way to it

led through the old banqueting-hall. There the party paused, while Colonel King held forth on the architecture, the innovations, and the history of the place.

It belonged to the older part of the Abbey, and was so large that the little party trooping through it were no more in it than a handful of leaves scattered on the surface of a lake. It was hung with shields and spears and coats of mail that had done service in many a crusade against the Turks, and everything in it was a trophy of valour, daring, and knightly service. The heir to all this heritage of dignity paid but little attention to Colonel King's discourse, and wandered off with Lady Margaret, who was tapping the armour smartly with her riding-whip and making jocose remarks about the figures of his ancestors. Presently they went up together into the little balcony—a balcony used for minstrels in the olden time—and stood there leaning over the balustrade and talking together in low voices. Lady Margaret was quizzing every one and everything through her eyeglass; he was listening and looking amused.

"Ah," said Colonel King, looking up at them, "that's the best place, after all. You get the *tout ensemble*, as they call it in Froggy-land." He addressed Luigia, who was standing near him. "Let's go up," he added; and he laid his hand on her arm.

She shook it off and moved away. "I am not interested in the *tout ensemble*," she said.

Colonel King stared from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. Never before had she treated a suggestion of his with contempt. Never before had he seen on her face the shadow of ill-temper, or heard from her a word that was ungrateful, disobliging. Now, however, there was an unmistakable cloud upon her brow, and her words had been nothing less than downright rude. She had walked away from him over to a gauntlet hanging upon the wall, and was examining it minutely, by herself, in silence.

They were the best of friends, these two. At first he had taken her on trust, simply because she was the wife of his oldest, dearest friend. Since Thomas Rodney had set his heart on her, therefore William King could not fail to open

his, and having opened it, she had entered in and remained there. He had since learned to care for her for her own sake. She was always sweet and gentle in her manner to him, yielding him a graceful touch of deference that was peculiarly gratifying to the old bachelor's vanity. Women in society were apt to pass him by as elderly, uninteresting, eccentric, but his friend's young wife would leave many a younger man to come to his side, and was always ready with unfailing interest and sympathy. In this close friendship between the two, Thomas Rodney gloried, and for it he loved them both, if possible, better than before. It was therefore a new thing to be treated as she had just treated him; he did not know what to make of it; it hurt him deeply.

He hung about near her for a minute or two, and his fluent discourse on the architecture came to a sudden end. The rest strolled away up the grand staircase to the picture-gallery, Lady Margaret waved "ta-ta" and went off with Lord Egan in her train—*she* wasn't going to be put through the pictures for anybody, she said.

Luigia left the gauntlet and swept round on Colonel King, who was hovering near, with an air of anxiety and resolution.

"I am a perfect bear to-day," she said, "and don't know what I am saying, but I have a raging headache. Do, please, forgive me."

"My dear child, you don't look well," he said; and he laid his hand on her arm with a fatherly tenderness.

"Oh, I am well—perfectly well. Let us go up there, as you said. Show me things. I want to forget my headache. Talk."

As he looked kindly, searchingly into her heavy eyes, she flung his hand away again with a half laugh that had no mirth in it.

"Don't look at me like that—I am not in the mood to be criticised. Let us go and do the *tout ensemble*—it will fill up the time as well as anything else, I dare say;" and she led the way up the little, steep staircase to the minstrel's gallery.

It was empty now, and of this fact she had been fully aware before she suggested making for it. She leaned on the balustrade, where a few minutes before Lord Egan had been leaning, and looked round her on the battered armour, and up at the tattered flags swinging their rags above her head. Colonel King stood at her side.

It was a gloomy place, solemn and deserted-looking, but there was something grand about it too. Its walls were of stone, many feet thick, the roof lofty, and the windows scarcely more than narrow slits. At the opposite end to the minstrel's gallery was a great oriel window filled with coloured glass, which had been inserted during the last century. Through it a dim and sombre light penetrated, bringing out of the shadow here and there the battered breastplates, helmets, shields, and spears. Away in the dim recesses of the roof drooped the tattered pennons from their standards, fluttering their bloodstained rags in the little gusts of air that now and then found their way through the chinks.

"A fine place!" said Colonel King, "and cheerful enough, I dare say, when there are half a hundred faggots burning on the hearth and a glaring torch in every niche."

"Rather alarming, though," said Luigia, leaning on the rail and looking round her in a reflective attitude. "One feels instinctively one ought to lower one's voice, if only out of respect to the flags."

"They've been through some magnificent scenes," observed Colonel King. "There was one that was in the battle of Cressy, I believe, though I don't think there's more than a thread or two of it left now."

"Their times have passed away for ever, and we stand here to-day and care no more about them than future generations will care for us and our fate," continued Luigia. "It makes one feel very insignificant."

"It does, rather," said Colonel King.

"But I don't like to feel insignificant. And I don't like being looked at by things that have borne a great part in the world. It makes me uncomfortable."

There was a footstep behind them coming from the pic-

ture-gallery. She turned and met Lord Egan's eyes. He was returning, and alone. He came into the little balcony, and leaned on the railing at her side.

"We have been discussing your old hall," she said, "and I have come to the conclusion that I don't like it."

"Don't you?"

"No, not at all."

She was leaning on the railing, swinging her gloves idly in her hand. There was a stain of blood-red light from the oriel window flickering over her face and hair. He watched it as she moved. It came from the colouring in his coat-of-arms, with which the panes of the window were decorated.

"Have you any particular reason for disliking it?" he asked her presently. Colonel King heard himself called by Lady Meldrum in the picture-gallery, and went off to continue his duties as showman. Neither Luigia nor Lord Egan suggested following him.

"Yes," she returned. "It is too heroic. I don't like dwelling with the gods upon the tops of mountains. I prefer the world and the dust, and the lowest, flattest plains."

"I am glad," he said, "that your feeling is not personal. I thought probably you disliked it simply and solely because it was mine."

"That may have something to do with it," she said, with a laugh. "One's prejudices are sometimes too subtle even to be traced."

There was a long pause. She went on swinging her gloves backwards and forwards idly; he looked out across the gloom towards the painted light lying in patches on the dark wall.

"After all," he said presently, "the place is not so godlike as you suppose. It represents a good deal of the lower side of human nature. "That, for instance," pointing to a gauntlet hanging on the wall, "belonged to an ancestor of mine who was famous for making raids on his neighbours' cattle. And that spear," looking upwards to one of two that were crossed beneath a flag, "was used by another in courting his wife."

"Did he woo her with a *spear*?"

"More or less. She was the daughter of an enemy, and he had to kill her father and brothers before he could get her."

"Didn't she like him?"

"No. He bore her away shrieking over their dead bodies."

"What a nice man! So unlike our modern lovers! How did she behave when he got her home?"

"He married her, and gave a great banquet in this hall. He put her in the place of honour, and loaded her with jewels, but she flung her wine in his face, trampled the jewels under foot, and rushed out of the hall."

"She was prejudiced, I suppose, on account of the father and brothers. Go on; I am beginning to find the heroine interesting too—which is unusual. How did it end?"

"Oh, it ended well. They led a cat-and-dog life for a year, and then an old lover of hers came back from the Crusades and made a raid on this place one night. Her husband was wounded and brought in to die."

"Dear me! But, of course, he recovered, and lived happily ever afterwards?"

"No, he died in her arms."

"In her arms? Why? Surely a most uncomfortable place to die in!"

"She loved him all the time, only she couldn't be brought to confess it."

A tinge of real crimson came into her cheek to join the painted light that was dancing over it. "What a pretty story! I hope she didn't weep and tear her hair like so many frantic heroines."

"Why shouldn't she?"

"It would spoil her appearance for the next lover."

"You think, then, that she would have another lover?"

"Of course—in all probability it was the enterprising crusader who had just killed her husband."

"Why should you think her such a demon?"

"Oh, not a demon—only a woman. Castles were few and far between, you must remember, and men were scarce in those days. Probably there was no one else. Besides,

there is a certain sort of interest about a man who has gone a little off the beaten track—done a murder or something. It gives him a charm which most of them lack."

She dropped her glove into the hall below.

"I am so sorry," she said, laughing. "On a hot day, too!"

He went down to fetch it, and she watched him with a gleam in the languor of her eyes that was more cruel than mere mischief. He brought it back and handed it to her.

"I regret," he said, "that the arena below was not full of wild beasts, so that you might have had the pleasure of seeing me torn in pieces."

"You think it would have interested me? Possibly. I am fond of novelty. Thanks. I am infinitely obliged."

"You are very like the lady in the poem," he went on—"the one who sent her knight into the arena after her glove."

"Am I? That is an immense compliment. She was beautiful and fascinating and——"

"Very cruel."

"Cruel, do you think? Oh, well, she had excuses."

"What excuses?"

"I imagine she was a little off her head—with love."

"Love!"

"Yes. She must have gone through a good deal before she brought herself to do that. Do you think she would have sent a man she did not care for after that glove? I don't. She wanted to test him, and would rather have had him killed under her eyes than never have known that he cared."

"Do you call that *love?*"

"Oh, I don't know what I call it—it exists, and that is enough. It is an awful thing! It stirs up all that is evil and hideous, and leaves behind it the abomination of desolation. But it is capable of being just as tender as it is cruel—if it is ever given a chance."

He turned, and with a sudden, swift scrutiny, looked into her eyes. He caught their first expression, and in that momentary flash it seemed to him that there was a wild,

lawless abandonment of love speaking through them to his own. But he had scarcely realized it before she turned away with the old mocking laugh.

"I am writing a novel," she said, "and that is the way I make the heroine talk. Poetry doesn't sell, I find. Shall we go and look at the pictures?"

"No," he said, not offering to move. "Stay here."

"Stay here? Why?"

"Because I want you."

"An excellent reason! I also want the moon—badly, but I don't expect to get it. Let us go and do the family portraits."

"There is nothing to see."

"Isn't there? How odd!" She moved past him, and looked down the picture-gallery, along which the rest were strolling in pairs. "No one appears to have observed the fact."

He lifted his arms from the balustrade, and followed her in silence into the picture-gallery, expressing by his manner a sense of the hopelessness he felt of ever rousing in her one instant's consideration for him or anything he wished. The rôle she gave him was always the same—a hopeless following.

The gallery was long and light, and carpeted with matting. Down one side of it the pictures were hung, opposite the windows. She passed along, making witty, sarcastic little speeches about those that attracted her attention.

"Who is this?" she asked, pausing before one of the more modern portraits.

"My mother," said Lord Egan.

"Oh!"

She stood still, and looked up at it. It was the picture of a young face, young and calm; two opposites that rarely come together. There was a steadfastness and a repose about the eyes and brow that bespoke a latent fund of strength to do or to endure. She bowed down silently in the depths of her own restless heart before that beautiful calm.

"Was she noble?" she asked him.

"No," he said; "she was the daughter of an admiral—Admiral Montague."

"I did not mean that," she said, smiling. "She looks good. One might be sure she would be faithful unto death."

"Faithful to what?"

"Oh, all the most difficult things—duty and self-sacrifice and patience. I don't know whether she could care much about anything. Perhaps not. Could she?"

"I don't know much about her, I am sorry to say. She died when I was a baby."

"Because there comes the test! If people don't care, it is easy to be good—quite easy."

"Women are always good," said Lord Egan.

"Do you mean that?" She looked into his eyes with a flash of scorn.

"Anyway," he returned, "they are not possessed with seven devils like a man."

"Oh, there are women and women. Some are snowdrops and lilies of heaven, and nothing can touch their purity—they are not tempted, and they do not fall. But there are others who are really human beings, and their only form of heroism is to take life with a smile—as though they liked it."

"Why shouldn't they like it?"

"Because—if they are really woman, and not snowdrops and lilies—they will have to tear their hearts out by the roots, and trample them underfoot. It will come to them sooner or later, and it has to be done."

He made no answer.

"It has to be done," she went on with a bitter little laugh, "just the same as death has to be done, and all the other tragic and horrible things of life. There is no mercy shown us. If I were God I would give people—the poor, helpless people I had created—just one little chance of being happy without sinning."

She turned away. There was a storm in her heart. She was filled with a sense of her own helplessness in the face of the inevitable. There it rose before her—a great blank wall

over which she could not climb, through which she could not pass. Beyond lay the land she longed to possess, with its heavenly warmth and light; on this side the barest and driest desert, stretching for miles farther than she could see. It was cruel, it was horrible! She would not sit down meekly at the foot of the wall, and say, "Here will I wait, possessing my soul in patience till I die." She would beat and kick, and struggle blindly against the hateful barrier, and if she bruised her hands and feet in doing it, so much the better. Any pain was preferable to that stupid, senseless patience—even the pain of death and madness.

She passed on. Her manner changed and became flippant and heartless.

"Who is this?" pausing before another picture. "What a magnificent uniform! I hope he lived up to it."

"That is my grandfather, the admiral. Yes, he lived up to it—or, rather, *died* perhaps I should say. He went down with his ship."

"On purpose?"

"There was not room for all in the boats, so he stayed behind."

"And sent the cabin-boy ashore in his place! I do admire that! Probably the cabin-boy was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. It is to be hoped he did not turn out badly. The only sons of mothers who are widows are not to be relied on as a rule."

It is pleasant to be brutal sometimes. One eases one's self of the burden in one's own heart by flinging it at the head of another. Luigia was trying this form of relief now, but it did not do her much good.

They reached the further end in time, where the miscellaneous pictures were hung. Every one was gathered round one by a famous living artist, that had lately been added to the collection, and all were doing their best to sing its praises. Luigia and Lord Egan joined the outskirts of the ring.

It represented the morning after a storm at sea: the cold waves creeping up the shore, a grey, leaden sky, a broken spar, and on the rough stones, washed up from the wreck,

the figures of a man and woman locked in each other's arms. The face of the man, which was turned upwards, though sharpened in outline and livid with the hue of death, was young and beautiful; the woman's was hidden on his breast, her fair hair streaming over them both like a shroud. Their arms, stiffened in death, were around each other. The name of the picture was "In Death they were not divided."

"What a lovely thing!" murmured Mrs. Frayling, plaintively, "but *so* sad, *so* touching. I never can bear to look at these melancholy subjects myself—they have *such* an effect upon me afterwards!"

"How exquisitely the waves are painted!" chimed in Belle's voice. She was regarding the picture with her head on one side. "So green and transparent looking! One can almost fancy one smells the brine, can't one? I once painted a little thing myself——"

Her voice was drowned in one or two others that rose and made themselves heard. It was *so* soft, *so* lovely, the ladies all agreed, but too terribly sad. They began to move away.

"Do you like it?" said Lord Egan, at Luigia's side.

"Yes," she answered, regarding it through critical, half-closed eyes. "The colour of the sea is exactly like some silk I bought the other day for a dress—such a pretty colour!"

"It is a horribly melancholy thing, *I* think."

"Do you? Then why did you buy it?"

"I don't know. I liked it. I suppose I am morbid."

"Certainly you are morbid. It is better to be as I am—frivolous. The only thing it suggests to me is—my ball dress."

He stood and looked at it in silence.

"I envy them," he said at length, in a low voice.

"Envy them! Why?"

"Because," he said, turning to look fully in her eyes with sudden passion, "in death they were not divided. There are some things *worth* dying for, you know."

CHAPTER XXI.

"A MERE COQUETTE."

In the beginning of August Lady Adelaide and Daubigny came to Rodney for a week before going north for the grouse-shooting.

Daubigny had not been down since Luigia's marriage, though he had stayed with her and her husband in Paris the year before, and had joined them for a week or two at their little villa on Lake Como. But he had not yet seen Luigia as mistress of her own house.

She was quiet and reserved with him, but very considerate and attentive. He watched her about the house with an intensity of which he was quite unaware. She was so like his lost wife; he saw again those eyes of luminous, southern darkness, and again drank in the tones of sweet and thrilling pathos. He could see no flaw in her or in her devotion to her husband. Her affection for him was certainly sincere; she consulted his wishes before her own, humoured his whims, sympathized with him in all his occupations, and rendered him a wifely obedience and respect. But did she love him with her whole heart, as a wife should love her husband? That was the question Daubigny asked himself over and over again as he watched them together.

He and Lady Adelaide were regularly fêted in Rodney, and the society of the place exerted itself to entertain the visitors. All the world met at the Maxwells' picnics, the Harburtons' dinner-parties, Sir Ralph's lunches. There were one or two little dances hastily got up, a musical soirée at the Manor, various garden-parties at the outlying houses in turn; and Belle was truly in her element.

Daubigny watched his daughter narrowly. One day he said to the squire suddenly—

"What's that French fellow doing hanging about here?"

"Amusing himself, I should say," returned the squire, good-humouredly.

"Precisely. But what excuse does he give?"

"I don't think he gives any. He's got plenty of money, you know, and can do what he likes. He's studying English country life, I believe, with a view to writing a book—at least, that's what he says."

"Who is he? What do you know about him?"

"Oh, he's all right—very good family and connections, and all that. We met him first in Paris the winter before last, and then we came across him again in Rome and Naples. He went with us through the Mediterranean too, later on, picking up hints for his book. We know him very well, and he's a very obliging fellow. Don't you like him?"

"I have no personal feeling in the matter. But"—he looked her friend straight in the face with a good deal of meaning in his keen, dark eyes—"I think it strange he should hang about this place so long, and for no apparent reason."

"What do you mean?" said Rodney, facing him with his legs planted far apart and his hands thrust deep in his pockets; "explain yourself."

"I mean that I think it *dangerous*."

"Pooh!" ejaculated the squire, with contempt. "Do you think I can't look after my own wife?"

"I think you are *blind*."

"And I intend to be blind—to the sort of suspicions you mean. I know that Luigia is a good and honourable woman, and I trust her absolutely. She can't help being fascinating, and I'm not going to teaze her with petty jealousy. She has married an old man, and I should be a brute if I tried to keep her chained to my side. She is welcome to have her friends of either sex and of her own age, and it would be entirely unnatural if I denied them to her."

"I trusted too," broke out Daubigny, impetuously. "I trusted implicitly too—and with what result?"

"My dear fellow, I allow no man to talk to me about my wife as you are talking now. We had better change the subject."

"If she is your wife, she is my daughter," said Daubigny, sadly. "The tie is not much nearer."

"At any rate, no one—not even a father—has the right to interfere between husband and wife, and I must beg you to leave the management of Luigia to me."

Daubigny turned away without answering, and the squire said in a softened voice—

"You have been in a hard school yourself, dear boy, and I forgive you your suspicions on that ground. But, believe me, I know and understand Luigia well, and I am certain that the strongest hold I can have over her is my love and my trust in her. I have absolutely no fears, and if I had—if I imagined she was at all the sort of woman her mother was—I should still allow her absolute liberty. Women of that type are more likely to go wrong under a tight and jealous hand than when they are allowed their own way."

"You may be right," said Daubigny; and the subject was dropped between them.

He came upon them—Luigia and the young Count de Marnay—together one afternoon at their musical practice. He was pacing the broad gravel walk with his cigar, when the strains of a violin issuing from an open window near, met his ear. He bent his head beneath the sunblind and looked in, without being observed.

The room was Luigia's sitting-room, and was sweet with jars of wallflower and mignonette; the mellow afternoon sunshine flooded the wall and floor and Luigia's white dress, flecking them with the shadow of dancing vine-leaves from the creeper outside. She was at the piano and the Count stood at her side, violin in hand. A little table, with wine, grapes, pears, and delicate old china plates, stood close at hand, besieged by wasps in greedy pursuit of the sweet luscious juice. The room and the air outside was full of the quivering, long-drawn notes of the violin with its soft accompaniment.

Daubigny looked in and passed on. There was nothing wrong in two people practising their music together, but the sight of them had drawn his brows into a frown. Was it the weight of old memories, or was it a foreshadowing of

coming trouble that stirred him? He passed on, sauntering slowly with his cigar, pondering on many matters.

Twenty minutes later he came by the window again, and again he looked in. This time the scene was changed. They had left the piano and the violin, and were seated near the open window, the Count leaning his elbow on the little table and his head on his hand, looking at Luigia. The wine and the fruit were untasted at his side, and he did not see the buzzing wasp. She sat in a low chair in the sunflood from the window, with her guitar on her knee, singing in a low sweet voice.

One glance was enough for Daubigny. The intense gaze of the listener, something in his pale blue eyes, and the absolute stillness of his attitude, told their own tale. He looked hurriedly from one to the other, hesitated a moment as though about to speak, changed his mind, and passed on.

"The fly is caught securely in the web," he muttered to himself with a stern frown. "At present he does not realize his position, and thinks the spider his kindest friend. Before long he will learn to curse his fate."

Another time he passed them—the kindly spider and her victim—in an arbour near the end of the garden. The arbour was covered with creeping roses and sheltered by syringa bushes, the white-faced flowers gleaming like stars from the darkness of their leaves. Luigia's eyes, too, shone like stars from the twilight within, and the Count de Marnay was speaking to her in a low voice. Perhaps it was poetry he was reciting, for an open book was thrown upon the ground, or perhaps it was words from his own heart; but Daubigny did not stay to find out which, for he knew it made little difference in the end. He stopped abruptly at the entrance to the arbour.

"Count de Marnay," he said, "the squire is asking for you."

"He will speak with me?" said the young man, rising.

"Yes, and at once."

He made way for him to pass out, and the Count had no choice but to go.

"Pardon, madame, we continue after, *n'est-ce pas?*" he said to Luigia, who bowed assent.

When father and daughter were alone, Daubigny broke out—

"Can you find it in your conscience to act as you are doing with that young man? Have you no heart, that you can make victims of all the men you come across?"

"Victims!" said Luigia, lifting her head.

"Yes, victims. He is only one of many, perhaps; but I have some humanity in me and would save him, if I could."

"Save him? From what?"

"You know as well as I. Why try subterfuge with me? It is useless. I know the whole thing too well. I have watched it step by step, and it brings destruction. That man—any man who is fascinated by you—is doomed!"

She came out into the clearer light and faced him with proud indignation.

"May I not have a friend?" she said.

"No. With some women it is possible, but not with you. You know what you are doing. Though you may never sin as your mother sinned, yet I call you the most cruel and pitiless of women!"

He turned on his heel and walked off, leaving the stern echo of his words ringing in her ears. But what is the good of words? They can do little with women like Luigia, who have drunk deeply of the wine of flirtation and lost their reason in its intoxication.

He was present the next day when a magnificent bouquet of flowers arrived for her from the Count de Marnay. She received them carelessly and put them aside, continuing the conversation as though it were a matter of no account. He chafed in silence. When they were alone he rose and flung the bouquet into the empty grate.

"Luigia," he said sternly, "you have no right to accept flowers from any man but your husband."

"My husband does not tell me so," she replied coolly.

"Because he is too good—too trusting. But that is the very reason of all others why you should not take advantage of him."

"Do you think I want their flowers?" she said contemptuously. "Have I not a whole garden full of my own? It is tiresome to know what to do with them."

"You could stop it, if you liked. You could refuse to accept them."

"On what grounds? Shall I say, 'You are paying me attentions that mean more than mere politeness'? That would be embarrassing!"

He turned aside and walked to the further end of the room. She stooped to the grate and picked up the battered bouquet.

"Poor things! They are dreadfully bruised! They can go to the servants if you object to them in the drawing-room. As for me, I do not care what becomes of them so long as they are not ill-treated." And she left the room with them in her hand.

At Ingram too he looked with suspicion. He was not sure that Belle had not found good reason for breaking off her engagement; he imagined that something stronger than friendship might lie hidden in his relationship to Luigia.

Ingram had taken his *congé* very coolly. He had answered Belle's letter by return of post, and accepted the cancelling of the engagement without a murmur. The following week he had run down to Rodney as usual, and walked in upon the whole party with his most imperturbable smile. Belle, in greeting him, had been at first a little confused, but he was so absolutely at ease himself, that she soon recovered her self-possession, and behaved very much as she had always behaved to him.

"I suppose," he said to Luigia, when they were alone, "I ought to be doing the disconsolate lover—scattering my hair by handfuls, gurgling, loosening my necktie. But as Belle and I are still cousins, we can fall back on that relationship and go on as usual. In any case, I am afraid I should not be able to spend the remainder of my existence in fancying my necktie too tight for me."

"You never were in love with Belle," returned Luigia, "though I am certain there was once some woman whom you loved very deeply."

"Are you?" rejoined Jean. "Strange, then, that I should not myself even recollect her."

"You may say so, but I keep my own opinion all the same."

"Naturally, my dear Luigia, since you are a woman!"

Between Ingram and the Count, Daubigny had a bad time. The Count was painting Luigia's portrait, it seemed, as a surprise for the squire. They spent hours together every morning, in a long bare room at the top of the house that they called the studio—so Lady Adelaide told him. The sittings had been given up during the week of the visit, but she had been to see the half-finished picture. It was very pretty, she said.

Daubigny went up to look at it that very afternoon. He found quite a party gathered in the studio: Lady Adelaide tatting in the window; Belle, palette in hand, taking a lesson from the Count; Ingram sauntering about with a cigarette; Luigia, in costume, as model.

She was sitting sideways in a big carved chair at the further end of the long bare room, and was dressed quaintly in a low-bodiced muslin gown, with her hair piled high and tied coquettishly with ribbons. Her arms, dusky, slender, and beautifully formed, were bare. She got up as Daubigny entered, and came up the room towards him with a clattering of high heels on the bare floor.

"The sitting is over," she said. Then turning to him, "You must not tell Rollo, please. It is to be a surprise."

"Indeed!" observed Daubigny, dryly; and he walked deliberately over to the picture, now nearly finished, and regarded it in silence.

"It does not please you?" questioned the Count, observing the expression of his face.

"It is flattering," he said bluntly.

"C'est impossible!" murmured the artist, turning back to his palette.

Daubigny frowned and walked away.

"Poor me!" said Luigia, disconsolately. "Am I so very hideous?" She waylaid Daubigny, and looked up at him with a very pronounced dimple in the middle of her chin.

"I did not say that," he returned, still more bluntly than before.

"But you mean it?"—throwing out her hands dramatically. "Jean, say something to restore my vanity. I am quite wretched!"

Ingram walked over to her and regarded her critically as she stood before him, spreading wide her skirts.

"I never could see anything graceful, myself, in those extremely short waists," said Belle, drying her brushes; "but, of course, the Count thinks the whole costume quite perfect, as he arranged it."

"It is picturesque," said Ingram at length, "but I am not sure that I like it. No, you lose your character in that dress! It does not represent you."

"What is my character?"

"Oh, I haven't an idea. But in this you look quaint, piquant, charming—not the least like yourself, in fact."

"Thank you." She curtseyed low. "But I am not sure that I wished to hear so brutal a truth."

"Your hair ought to be smooth," he continued, ignoring her interruption, "and your dress severely simple. Then, one is not in the least prepared for anything you say or do. There is an element of sphinx-like mystery about you, as a rule, which you entirely lose in the character of a mere coquette."

"A mere coquette—that is what she is!" remarked Daubigny to himself, as he walked again over to the picture. "She flirts with one and all—even with *me*. And even *I* find it almost impossible to resist her."

"How long have you been over this portrait?" he asked the Count presently.

"About six months," replied the artist.

"And it is not finished yet!" cried Daubigny with an inward groan, adding to himself, "And even if it were, there would be the music, or the gardening, or the teaching English to take its place. When two people are bent on a thing, it is no good trying to stop them in any one direction—they will always find another."

That evening he listened to her singing with ears that

were more than ever on the alert. The songs she chose were all light and gay, and gaily and lightly she sang them, but every now and then, by accident, as it were, came a wailing note that thrilled with pain.

"She is not a mere coquette," he said to himself as he listened. "She is something more. And beneath that light manner of hers, there is now and then a touch of desperation. She is not safe—and her husband is a fool!"

He left Rodney Manor for the Scottish Moors with an anxiety in his heart that Lady Adelaide never dreamed of, and of which he dropped no hint himself. His eyes, naturally keen, and aided by an intense personal experience, had seen many little straws that showed him which way the wind blew.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RAINY EVENING.

It was a wet evening. Dinner was over, and Belle and Luigia had gone to the drawing-room, while the squire and the Count sat over their wine. Belle was playing softly in the dark; Luigia was sitting idly in a lounge-chair, dreaming. The windows were open; there was a soft pattering of rain on the roof and on the gravel outside; dark clouds were chasing one another before the face of the moon; there was a storm rising; the wind was sighing faintly in the trees.

There were voices in the hall, and the sound of an arrival. Belle stopped playing to listen. There was the squire's voice in hearty welcome, Sir Ralph's in answer, then Lord Egan's, a tramping through the hall, the echo getting fainter, and presently the sharp click of billiard-balls in the distance.

"Lord Egan and Sir Ralph have come," exclaimed Belle, still listening intently, "and they have gone into the billiard-room."

"Yes," said Luigia from the gloom.

In a few minutes the squire, smelling strongly of smoke, looked in with a petition to the ladies to join them in the billiard-room. Belle rose at once, but Luigia made excuses; she would come presently, she said; and they went out, leaving her alone in the fast-darkening room.

Directly she was alone, she went over to the window, the casement of which she flung wider open. She leaned out into the night—into the rain. It was dark; there were black clouds coming up thick and fast from the south. She leaned out, and with her hand groped among the straggling passion flower growing on the wall of the house. She picked one or two of the wet blossoms and put them in her hair, low down in its dark masses. Then she went out through the lighted hall to the billiard-room.

They all looked up as she entered. There was a brilliant flush of colour in her face, the wet passion flowers were shining in her hair, her eyes, deep and dark as the night skies, were shining too, with the gleam of moonlight on the waters of a lake, or the softness of the stars. She entered without noise, but Lord Egan, who was about to make a stroke, looked up and put down his cue.

"Don't let me disturb you," she said, waving aside the hand he held out to her. "Make your stroke—and let it be a brilliant one!"

"No chance of that!" he replied, turning back to the table and taking up his cue again. "I've played like an infant in arms for the last month."

"You certainly have fallen off wonderfully lately," cried the squire. "You used to beat me easily, and now I can swallow you whole without an effort."

Lord Egan made a random shot, and lost the game for himself and the Count. He put up his cue.

"It is no good," he said; "I'm playing as badly as it's possible to play, and the luck is against me."

He walked to the further end of the room, and, striking a match, relighted his cigarette, which had gone out.

"Your luck is against you, is it?" said Luigia. "I do not believe that. Try again. Play with me—we will see what we can do together."

He turned slowly as she came up the room towards him, and looked at her doubtfully. He said nothing.

"Play with me," she said again. "We will have a match. Who shall we play—Belle and Sir Ralph? That will be fair. And Rollo and the Count shall back us. Let us begin."

She took up a cue and made a creditable trial stroke. Lord Egan put down his cigarette and came to her side.

"Do you mean it?" he said.

"Of course. Why not?" she looked up into his gloomy face. "We will win—you and I; I speak prophetically."

The match was arranged, and the squire and the Count backed opposite sides, and watched the game with interest. Luigia played daringly, sometimes even brilliantly. Lord Egan backed her with steadiness and caution, and they won the game easily enough. Sir Ralph and Belle were beaten ignominiously.

"There!" exclaimed Luigia to her partner, when it was all over. "I told you so, but you did not believe me."

"I did not say I disbelieved you."

"No, but you looked it. I know your expressions—every one of them." She was chalking the tip of her cue carefully. "You do not deceive me as easily as I deceive you."

"No?"

"No. Did you enjoy the game?"

"I am not sure."

"What do you mean by that?"

He took up a billiard ball and rolled it to the further end of the table.

"Of course I liked playing with you," he said, "but—I don't know why you did it."

"Does it matter why I did it?"

"Yes. It makes all the difference."

"Well, suppose I said"—she was still chalking the already well-chalked cue, and looking down on it; the wet passion flowers and a knot of soft dark hair was all he could see of her—"that I did it simply and solely to put you in better spirits?"

"Would it be true?"

"Not altogether. I did it partly because I thought I should enjoy it myself. You and I do not often do things together. I wanted to try the experiment."

He made no reply.

"It has not turned out so badly, you see," she went on, looking up into his eyes with a smile that made him feel a little delirious. "Perhaps if we tried being friends as an experiment we might achieve great things. There is no telling."

He rolled another ball along the table, and then walked away deliberately from her to join the others. The Count came to her side and begged her to play with him.

"Not this evening," she said; "I have had enough. Let us try music as a change;" and she led the way to the drawing-room. The Count, Sir Ralph, and Belle followed her.

It was past ten o'clock before Lord Egan and the squire joined them. The room was still in darkness, except for the candles on the piano. Belle's flaxen head was hidden behind the music-book, Sir Ralph was roaring out a comic song to her accompaniment. The squire went over to the piano and joined in the chorus of "Ain't I the Cheese;" Lord Egan subsided into a lounge-chair as far as possible in the darkness.

Luigia and the Count were whispering together at the lattice. Their figures were shadowy; the soft light of the two wax candles on the piano could not penetrate so far. The casements were open, the shutters flung back, and in the intervals of "Ain't I the Cheese" and the sea-song that followed there could be heard the pattering of rain on the roof of the verandah, on the ivy leaves, on the japonica, on the gravel path; the smell of damp, fresh earth mingled with the smell of cigar-smoke that had come in with the gentlemen. Lord Egan sat in silence, watching the two shadowy figures at the window. A faint ray of candle-light fell across the Count's profile; the whiteness of Luigia's skirt was outlined in the gloom. Every now and then they whispered together, leaning towards each other, and for the moment very near. What was she doing? Whis-

pering away the heart and soul and honour of the man at her side? He told himself so, though his own heart was throbbing wildly with jealousy all the time. Once she picked something from the wall outside—a flower or a leaf, he could not be sure which—and after a minute or two she let the Count take it from her. The man watching them from the darkness sat silent and motionless, fighting a hundred invisible foes. The enemy was the devil and all his angels, who were crowding upon him thick and fast, and the battle-ground was his own jealous heart.

"Now, my Lorelei," said the squire, turning to Luigia at the end of the second sea-song, "it is your turn. We haven't heard your voice for a week. I don't know what's become of it lately."

"A song?" she said, leaning forward from the shadows and picking up her guitar. "What sort of song?"

"A love-song, of course."

"Always love!"—with a contemptuous accent.

She touched the strings lightly. Then, after a moment, she leaned back against the window-frame and began to sing. She sang very softly, and the song she chose was "Love's young dream."

"Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.
'Tis a light that ne'er can shine again
On life's dull stream.
Oh, 'tis a light that ne'er can shine again
On life's dull stream."

Dangerous words! treacherously sweet and alluring! As he listened he knew that they were true! Ah, yes, they were true! Love is all the world, the one reality, the beautiful, dangerous, alluring light that ne'er will shine again on life's dull stream. What if one misses it altogether, lets it slip, through some far-strained sense of honour—the one beautiful reality, the one perfect joy! Love's young dream! What is there to compare with it? What is there in the whole wide world to compare with it? The time is slipping by—take it, snatch it, hold it fast, wrap it round with loving arms—it will never come again.

The song died, and voices rose around the singer, but the silent listener at the further end of the room neither spoke nor moved. Blankness and desolation had fallen upon him ten times greater than before. She was near him, almost within reach of his hand, yet she was farther from him than the stars. He shut his eyes—they were full of blinding tears. Life's dark stream stretched endlessly before him, the light that ne'er could shine again was going out in the blackness of despair.

The Count took up his guitar and answered her with Shelley's passionate Arabian love-song—

> "My faint spirit was sitting in the light of thy looks, my love;
> It panted for thee, like the hind at noon for the brooks, my love."

The song went on to words of still more exquisite beauty, but he scarcely listened to them. His mind clung to those with which it had opened—he was like the hind at noon panting for water-brooks, dying of thirst, mad with longing. Why not rise up, and, thrusting aside all scruples, use the strength of his arm and take his desire to his heart? Why not carry her off to the forests—away to the water-brooks where the buck and the hind and the creatures of nature can wander at will and live the life God meant for them? Why not? He would do it. Yes, to-morrow; but what was the use? She hated him; the forests and freedom could give him no more than he had now; she would not wander with him over the earth, dwell with him alone, and live the life of love. She held herself aloof from him, looked at him with alien eyes, denied him her love; and that being so, there was no possible combination of circumstances, or train of events, in the whole universe that could bring her one whit nearer him.

Another song—and again Luigia's voice, and again the theme was love—love—love! It was a lovely voice, but utterly sad in its loveliness. Was it really only a trick of the throat, as she said, or was it that she knew and felt the agony of longing and despair? The notes were throbbing with it; again he closed his eyes.

They were Shelley's words:

"Oh, lift me from the grass!
I die, I faint, I fail.
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast.
Oh, press it close to thine again,
Or it will break at last."

He rose almost as the last words were dying away and went over to the window.

"I must go," he said abruptly, holding out his hand to her.

"Why?" she said, looking up. "It is quite early."

"Late or early, I must go."

She threw aside her guitar. The Count was called to the piano to look out a glee.

"Love songs are very stupid," she said. "No wonder you are tired of them."

"I am not tired of them, and I do not find them stupid."

"Why do you want to go, then?"

"What is the good of staying?" he broke out, and though he spoke in an undertone, his manner was full of suppressed vehemence. "I am going—and going for ever."

"For ever? How?"

"Somewhere—anywhere—what does it matter where? North, south, east, west, it is all the same to me."

"I don't understand," she said, turning away her face into the shadow.

He dropped on to the seat beside her. The others were all talking together as they sorted out glees at the piano.

"I telegraphed yesterday for my yacht from Cowes," he said. "She will be at Dawlish to-morrow. I came here to-night for the last time—to say good-bye."

Luigia was silent. She had lifted her arms to the window-ledge, and was leaning her head on her hand. He could not see her face, but in the faint ray of the candle

light, it seemed to him that the passion flowers were trembling strangely in her hair.

"It is very sudden," she said presently, and her voice sounded unnatural in her own ears.

"It has to be sudden, or I could not do it at all."

"You cannot go at once," she said, after another pause; "you are to be Captain Dowie's best man at the wedding, and that is not till Friday."

"I must stay for that, of course."

"And you will be at the ball in the evening?"

"No. I would not go to that ball for anything the Fates could offer me."

She looked out into the darkness of the night. The rain had stopped, but everything was dripping—dripping—dripping with tears. There was a watery moon struggling to make herself seen amid a sea of clouds; the great wet ivy leaves were shining here and there out of the gloom. He rose and held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said.

"I shall not say good-bye to-night," she said, neither rising nor turning towards him. "There are three whole days yet."

"I shall not see you again before I go."

"We shall meet at the wedding."

"If you call that meeting. I don't. I shall not speak to you, probably."

"Then *I* shall speak to *you*." She gave him her hand for a moment. "It is not good-bye," she said; "I shall see you again."

He turned away. He knew the worth—or, rather, the worthlessness—of these little things she said only too well—he was not to be led astray by them. She said them to the Count, to Ingram, to every one, to him least of all. They sounded sweet, and as though she cared a little; but they meant nothing—nothing whatever. He said good-bye to the others and went out. A few minutes afterwards Luigia, white, and with a wild look in her eyes, rose and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS FRAYLING'S WEDDING.

THE two days passed, and the day of the wedding came.

Luigia dressed herself for the ceremony with exceeding care, and this was necessary since anxiety and sleeplessness had laid their narrowing fingers on every line of her face. Her *toilette* was exquisite beyond a doubt, the dove-coloured gown a marvel of grace, the tiny bonnet distractingly becoming, the gloves, the shoes, the big bouquet, one and all perfection. But her face, in its expression of pale, strained, suppressed suffering, wore a look that no girl's face should have known, and there were deep, dark marks under her eyes like bruises.

She drove with her husband into Tadcaster, and passed beneath the elms into the hushed, sacred twilight of the cathedral. The place was filling fast; wedding guests were sweeping up the aisles into the seats of honour; there was a subdued whispering among the relatives, a rustling of silks, a straying fragrance of flowers, a pervading atmosphere of expectancy, intensity, excitement. Luigia sat with the big bouquet on her lap and her eyes on the west door through which the bridal party must enter. She was also expectant, excited, at tension, and her heart beat as fast as any fluttering bride's.

Presently the bridegroom, accompanied by Lord Egan, arrived and clanked up the aisle with a jangling of accoutrements and the heavy thud of spurs. Luigia's heart beat faster. They went to the foot of the chancel steps and stood there waiting, talking now and then in low voices to those in the front seats. Luigia looked and looked and looked her heart away—there was only to-day in which to do it—to-morrow he would be gone. And as she looked a wild jealousy rose within her. She was far enough from him as it was; she was going to be farther. She was jealous of his future, jealous of the people who were coming into his life, jealous of everything that was going to happen to him apart

from her. She began to realize how far—how very far away from him she was and always must be. She could not get near him, love him as she would. The scar on his cheek told her that; it had come to him amid scenes and surroundings such as she could not even picture; to some one else—some friend or servant—had fallen the sharing of his perils and adventures. A burning jealousy of this unshareable side of a man's life rose within her, and as the organ swelled forth, and every one stood up, and the bride came slowly up the aisle, a choking, hysterical sensation came upon her, and a blind rebellion against that decree that meets us face to face at every turn: "Thus far and no farther shalt thou go."

When she knelt with the rest, her overstrained nerves gave way, and she sobbed almost aloud. There was an agony of longing in her, a desperate desire to become part of his life in some way, to fling everything aside but the belonging to him to the uttermost limit of possibility; and yet she realized fully that, come what would, this could never be. Even as his wife, the beloved of his heart, there would always be a great gulf fixed—the gulf which lies between two souls which are not, and never can be made, one. Therein lies the tragedy of a great, absorbing love; it never is, and never can be, satisfied while the limitations of this world exist.

The service went on, irrespective of Luigia sobbing miserably with hidden face. The bride and bridegroom became man and wife, to go through the same agony of endeavour, the same insatiable craving for *more*. She looked at them through her tears, with a mingling of the profoundest pity and envy. To them, at any rate, was given the *right* to make that mad endeavour; and even if they failed in touching souls, they had still the fulfilment of their earthly love—the belonging to each other in body and estate as long as life should last. And what a wonderful thing that in itself must be! She dropped her face again, with a prayer that was strangled in its birth, since there was nothing to pray for, nothing to hope, nothing to possess.

After the ceremony, a reception was held at Colonel

Frayling's house, on the outskirts of the town, and thither the guests drove. Luigia tried to hide the traces of her tears from her husband, but he evidently noticed them, and she caught him looking at her once or twice with a grave, kind scrutiny that brought the blood rushing in a flood to her face. However, even if by any chance he guessed a little of what was troubling her, what did it matter? Nothing was of any consequence, but the one thing—the one unendurable, agonizing parting that was drawing nearer every minute.

The gardens were thrown open, and the guests strolled about or stood in groups in the great, airy rooms, where the wedding presents were displayed. Lord Egan did not come near Luigia; he had bowed to her from across the room, and gone off a moment afterwards with his pretty bridesmaid into the gardens. She was left to be monopolized by others.

She went through it as best she could. She turned her back on the garden, and talked and laughed, and smiled a wan smile. People kept coming up to her and speaking to her. There were ancient beaux, who made her sweeping compliments; there were young admirers, who stood rather in awe of her; there were jealous women, who talked against her behind her back and smiled in her face; there was an endless stream of commonplace acquaintances, who merely made their remarks upon the weather and the occasion, and passed on. To one and all she was invariably gentle, smiling, graceful, courteous; but her smile grew more wan, and her eyes looked past them, and she did not always catch what they were saying.

Time was passing, the precious minutes were slipping away, and still he did not come near her. Four o'clock struck from the cathedral clock. Every one was congregating in the hall, to see the bride's departure. Lord Egan came in from the garden with the pretty bridesmaid, and joined the crush at the foot of the stairs. There was the bride at last!—on the stairs, in the hall, making a triumphal progress through the thronging relatives and friends to her bridegroom waiting on the steps. Then, as she joined him

and they went down together to the carriage, a cheer rose from the crowd, men waved their hats, women their handkerchiefs, a shoe was thrown, a hailstorm of rice, and amidst general excitement, the carriage drove off. Luigia seized this moment in which to make her way through the press of people to Lord Egan, standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Are you really going away to-night?" she asked him abruptly.

"Yes. I shall be on board by eight this evening," he said, looking down on her with grave, almost stern eyes.

"And you won't come to the ball?"

"No."

"Not if I beg and entreat you?"

"Not even if you do that."

A pause. She stood before him, brushing the petals of her bouquet backwards and forwards across her lips—a funny little habit he knew well. He looked past her—over her head (which was also a habit of his), at the people crowding in the doorway, waving hats and handkerchiefs to the departing bride.

"If you come to the ball," she said, "I will keep some dances for you."

"Thank you. But the dances would be no pleasure to me."

"How do you know? Do you judge of the future by the past? That is foolish! Things do not always remain exactly as they were."

"I would not go to this ball for a king's ransom?"

"Would you do it for—*anything else!*"

She looked up at him as she spoke the last words, and he brought his eyes from the doorway to meet hers. He was leaning against the wall, with his hands behind him, grave and pale.

"No," he said—"nothing!"

She held aside her bouquet and let him see her trembling lips; they were smiling though they trembled.

"Will you come," she said, "if I promise to dance with you as often as ever you like to ask me? Will you come if I go away with you afterwards—and we sit in the dark

somewhere and talk? Will you come if I give you a flower —to take away with you over the seas?—if I——"

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "what do you mean by this?"

"Only one thing—that I want to dance with you. If you are going away to be drowned in the sea"—the strange, quivering smile died away, and she put her bouquet to her lips again—"I should like to have one last waltz with you first."

Every vestige of colour had gone from his own face now, the little muscles round his mouth were quivering. She began to turn away, but turned back again to say—

"Will you come? Tell me."

He still said nothing. She looked up in his face, then quickly tearing one of the blossoms from her bouquet, held it out to him.

"Here, take it—it is my pledge of faith," she said; and without waiting for any sort of reply, she put it into his hand and moved away.

Lord Egan, holding the flower in his hand, stood stupidly staring at it for a minute or two, then, without attempting to fulfil his duties among the departing guests, he turned aside into the conservatory, and lost himself in a maze of bewildered feeling and a wilderness of flowers.

At the bridesmaids' ball that evening he was the first guest to arrive, and was forced to stand about in doorways for fully twenty minutes with Mrs. Frayling's frail, heavily ringed hand laid confidingly on his arm, while she rhapsodized over the sweetness of married life, and unburdened to him the full flood of her maternal hopes and fears.

By degrees the guests arrived, and dancing began. The first waltz he had with his pretty bridesmaid, the second with Lady Margaret; then came another period of hanging about the doorways, and more conversation with Mrs. Frayling; then the Lancers with a frisky matron, and then—Luigia came!

She entered the ball-room on her husband's arm, with Belle and the Count in attendance. She was in the airiest of white gauze, with pale-tinted azaleas, and was smiling on

her admirers as usual as they crowded round her. But she looked desperately tired in spite of her smiles, and almost as white as her dress. To the man who loved her, that air of fatigue endeared her more than the most brilliant beauty could have done. He waited till the first group of men gathered round her programme had dispersed, and then crossed the room to her side.

"May I see your programme?" he said.

The colour rushed into her face, then drained away again, leaving it whiter than before. With nervous hands she fumbled for the card, which she had tucked into the broad ribbon of her waistband. He waited silently, and examined it in silence when it was given him.

"You are not engaged for this," he said. "May I have it?"

"I have promised it to the Count."

"It is not down."

"No, but we always dance the sixth together."

He looked rapidly over his shoulder. The Count was coming up to claim her.

"I keep you to the letter of your promise," said Lord Egan, putting his arm round her waist as he spoke. "You said I should have what I asked for—I ask for this." And quite coolly he carried her off into the centre of the room, undaunted by the flash of indignant fire in the Count's astonished eyes.

She said nothing, and they danced the dance through in absolute silence. When it was over, they went and sat on a couch in the hall, and the Count glared at them from the shadow of a curtain.

"He is very angry," said Luigia, as she sat down.

"It doesn't matter," said Lord Egan.

"Not in the least," she returned.

They sat down side by side, in full view of all the people. He wore the gardenia she had given him in his buttonhole; the edges of the petals were turning a little brown already, but it smelt as sweet as ever. He turned towards her and, leaning his arm on the back of the couch, looked at her fully and deliberately.

"Let me fan you," he said.

She gave him her fan. Dead silence ensued, Luigia looking down or anywhere but at him, he looking at her and fanning her. Couples strolled past them, laughing and talking, the Count glared more than ever. The whole of the rest of the interval between the dances passed without their speaking a single word.

When her next partner came for her they rose, and Lord Egan gave her back her fan. As he did so, he looked at her for a moment with his whole soul in his eyes, reckless of who might see or how the look might be interpreted. As she met it her heart fainted within her—but it fainted with joy.

The second dance with Lord Egan was also danced in absolute silence. At the end they went out into the garden and along a dark path between the laurel bushes. There was a full moon, and the sky was bright and clear, but the paths were overshadowed with trees, and in some places quite dark. They came to a summer-house at the end of the path—a roomy, bowery place covered with creepers. He held aside a drooping mass of jasmine that hung over the doorway and she went in. He went in too. The place was dark and empty and silent. The moon had got as far as the threshold, where its light lay in a flood of white, but beyond that it could not penetrate. Luigia stood in the darkness, and he stood in the doorway facing her, with his hands on the doorposts. The entrance was barred, and all means of escape cut off. He spoke in a rapid, breathless undertone.

"You forced me to come here to-night—I didn't do it of my own accord. You're responsible—I can't help what I do. I—I——"

He broke off as suddenly as he had begun. She said nothing, standing before him in the darkness, immovable. A stray moonbeam broke through the creepers at the side and touched one of her arms near the wrist, where the diamonds in her bracelet flashed with little darts of lightning.

"I—I can't help it," he said stammeringly. His hands dropped from the doorposts, and in a moment had found

hers in the darkness. They were trembling as her own were trembling, but they knew how to hold the thing they wanted, and she could not have got away if she had wished to. But she did not wish it.

Whose heart was it throbbing like that in the darkness? Why was the air so full of sound? What was this wild, chaotic emotion that was blinding their eyes and deafening their ears? What was happening? Nothing was happening. Only the night wind stirred the leaves of the creepers with a faint rustle, and the scent of the gardenia came closer and grew stronger.

"Let me," he whispered, "I must—I *must*."

He was hurting her hands, but she did not know it; the soft fingers were being crushed, but she felt nothing. The gardenia came nearer, its scent grew deadly, his cheek touched her hair.

"Let me," he whispered again, and no one and nothing said "no."

There was silence, but in that silence he told her all he meant and felt and longed for in a way that men have told women such things ever since the world of men and women has existed. The ill-fated gardenia dropped a petal or two, bruised and broken, to the ground, Luigia's own azaleas were dropping too, crushed to death in a joy that was not their own. Breathless and trembling they stood silent, and this world and its precepts faded out of sight.

After a time, by mutual consent, they sat down on the wide, dusty seat that ran round the summer-house, and he lifted her arms and put them round him, and with his own he held her close. Then the darkness closed in on them, the moon disappeared, the night wind died away, and they drifted out on a sea of silence to lands that have no name.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RENUNCIATION.

THERE had been three days of bliss after the mutual confession, "a new heaven and a new earth," and in the newness and the wonder of it Luigia had risen to supreme heights and taken her love in her hand and cast it from her. They must part, she told him—part for ever. The widest seas could not divide them now that their souls were one and all misunderstanding swept away. She had risen to heights in which she felt that death itself could not rob her of him, and that all eternity was theirs.

She had met him in the copse behind the quarry—in a fascinating lavender muslin gown, with a hat full of fairy thistledown—and explained all this to him. He did not seem to care about the eternity she spoke of—he did not want her with a harp and crown somewhere in the clouds, he told her; he wanted her *now*, as she was, in that particular hat and gown. She explained again, but he would not listen. He wanted to hold her hand, put his arm round her waist, kiss her. None of these things were allowed. He did them in spite of her, but it was not very satisfactory. Oh for the summer-house again, and the light night wind, and the rustling leaves, and the throb of her heart against his own! But the past came not back again, and this was an altogether different Luigia that he had to deal with. At last, angry and baffled, he went away—swearing that she did not love him, and that he would fling away that wretched bit of dead gardenia that for the last three days had been his dearest treasure. But resolution failed him, and he clung to it, angry as he was, and took it away with him on that aimless journey that was to last for ever.

It was all over—the agony of parting—and she had not shed a tear. In the moment of fulfilment it is comparatively easy to renounce; it is when the heart is hungry with longing that the stress and strain is felt. Now the exaltation of spirit that comes with sacrifice to a higher light was

fast dying away, and a blank sense of desolation was filling its place. The sharpness of the pain startled her; she had not foreseen it; and in fear, with a sinking heart, she hurried off to church on Sunday evening to say her prayers and bind her resolutions afresh.

It was a beautiful, calm summer's evening, and the little church was full of dim, peaceful twilight. Luigia sat alone in the pew belonging to the Manor. From her place she could see through the open doorway across the cornfields on the low hills, soft in the sunset; a lingering ray had entered the porch and was lying on the bent head of old Mathew, the village centenarian, as he sat there leaning on his stick. It was all peaceful and quiet and full of repose. So were the words of the white-haired old man, also in the evening of life, who was preaching to his flock in the time-honoured phrases that fell with familiar rhythm on unlistening ears. He had nothing new to say, and after the first few sentences Luigia did not even attempt to follow him, but the words of his text still rang in her ears: "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

What indeed! She knew she had done right in sending him away, but that parting was now five days old, and a great longing to see him again had risen up to reproach her. Her soul—was it so very important? Was it worth one glimpse of the face she loved, one tone of the dear voice she never should hear again? She scarcely thought so. Again and again she told herself during that prosy, rambling, sleepy sermon, that there was nothing—*nothing* to be given in exchange for a man's soul; but she was beginning not to believe it. The significance and value of the soul was sinking away before the greatness of a longing that was coming back to her with tenfold strength. What is a soul, after all, that one should sacrifice so much to it? Who can say that there is such a thing at all?

After the sermon came the hymn—

"A few more years shall roll,
A few more seasons come,
And we shall be at rest with those
Asleep within the tomb."

She stood up and sang it with the rest. Life's little day ebbs out, and in the face of eternity it is short, but taken minute by minute, it is long, and when the heart is aching with unfulfilled longing, it is an eternity in itself. How was she to get through the stretch of years that lay before her? How live that barren, naked life without the one thing that made it worth the living?

> "A few more suns shall set
> O'er these dark hills of time,
> And we shall be where suns are not,
> A far serener clime."

Yes, but did she want heaven? No, not half so much as she wanted a glimpse of one human face, the clasp of one human hand, the sound of the voice that she loved. These things outweighed the bliss of all celestial things a thousand times over. She looked away through the open door to the hills—the dark hills of time—that stood between her and the heavenly shore, and she told herself passionately that she had done foolishly in sending him away, and that heaven and the vague, unreal, heavenly shore could never be anything to her in comparison with the man she loved on earth.

She walked home alone through the gathering twilight to the quiet old house standing in the midst of its dewy fields and shrouding trees. It was as silent as the grave when she entered it. She went into the dining-room and sat down, and the shadows seemed gathering thickly round her and hemming her in. She was alone, alone for evermore, and life stretched before her in an endless blank of days.

She was in reality alone for two days. The squire had taken Belle to meet Lady Adelaide and Daubigny on their way to the Italian Lakes, and he would not return till the following day. Belle—with her innumerable trunks, her fashionable gowns, her perfumes and powders and coquettish glances—had gone, the visit was over. The summer was going too, slipping away into the land of the Have-beens, and there was no more golden splendour of warmth

and light and joy to look forward to. Luigia's summer was over too—the short ecstasy of love in its fulfilment—and only the desolation of autumn, and the bleakness of winter lay before her.

She sat in the gathering shadows, and a great and terrible gloom settled down on her. What had she done? Why had she insisted on that cruel parting? Was it altogether necessary? Could they not have gone on loving each other, and meeting now and then? What was the harm of meeting, and why should they not indulge in it since it gave them such exquisite pleasure? It was awful—this blank sense of desolation; she did not see how she was going to endure it. She got up, and walking over to the window, stood there looking out—away to the hills and the valley now shrouded in evening mist.

"Where is he?" she asked herself; "where is he now? What is he doing? All the world seems to lie between us, and we shall never come near each other again. What am I to do? How can I bear it?"

There was a sheep-bell tinkling far away in some wet, misty field; the lights of the village were beginning to gleam through the trees. She stretched out her hands to the quiet evening in an agony of longing and appeal.

"He is there—somewhere—lonely, miserable, and I cannot go to him. I must never see him any more, and life is long—longer than I know how to bear!"

The gentle sheep-bell tinkled once again, and through the garden came the voices of the servants returning from church; life was going on as usual, there was no possible escape.

She turned, and leaned her face against the shutter of the window, her eyes were filled with blinding tears.

"I love him! I love him! I love him!" she cried, breaking into passionate sobbing, "and if I may not have him near me, to touch, to see, and to hear day by day, then let me die! O God of heaven, let me die!"

That night she did not sleep. She lay through the short hours of darkness, looking out through the unshuttered window at the sky, or watching the ghostly shadows creep

across the floor. Yet she did not see the stars, or the creeping shadows, or the dark branch of the thorn-tree tapping on the window pane, or any hole or corner of the pretty old-fashioned room with its dimity hangings and spindle-legged furniture. The outer world was gone, and that that remained was the inner one of feeling, where all was tumult and confliction. She watched for the dawn with eagerness, and when it came she opened the casement to admit it, and leaned out over the sleeping garden with a sense of wonder at the awful beauty of the world at that hour. The stillness was profound: not a bird, not a leaf stirred; the gardens and woods were wrapped in mist, the winding paths were lost in mystery. The sky alone showed signs of life, where, far away in the east, a faint flutter of light was coming up from behind the hills. Sitting still and wearied in the great square chair, with her head resting against its carved back, and the chill, damp air of early morning blowing in upon her through the open casement, she watched the coming of the new day, the first of those endless days that stretched before her; but wearied out at last, she closed her eyes unconsciously, the quiet room and its surroundings faded away, and she went to her lover and dwelt with him in the land of dreams.

Long before the dew was off the grass she was out in the fields. It was early, very early; the grass on the lawn was thick with it, and so were the leaves on the trees; the sun was rising with a rosy glow on the harvest fields, now shorn of their glory. She went up into the hills and out on to the moorland beyond, where the air blew fresh and free. There were signs of autumn everywhere—the heather deepening from mauve into purple, the rowan-trees laden with ripening berries, the bracken turning golden, the blackberry leaves red and brown. The ash-trees were fading, the harebells gone, in the air was a new touch of crispness, and the voice of the rocky stream as it rushed past was loud with the promise of winter's coming torrent.

It was past nine when she got back to the house, and the gardener had swept all the paths as neat as a new pin, and was trundling his barrow with a loud-sounding rumble to

the region of hot-beds and potting-out frames at the back. The old house seemed to be slumbering still, standing silent and drowsy in the morning sunshine, with the pears ripening on its southern wall, and the last of the roses dropping their petals on to the newly swept path. Here and there a casement was open, giving glimpses into the quaint, cosy rooms within. They were all deserted, dark with panelling, bright with sunshine, sweet with flowers. She went indoors and set about her household duties, sorting, dusting, arranging, putting a button on the squire's coat, mending his gloves. But these little duties did not calm her. She felt as though she could never be calm again.

It was late in the afternoon when he arrived, so cheerful, hearty, and altogether from another world than Luigia's that it seemed to her like a breath of salt sea-air blown inland across an arid, burning desert where the heat was blinding and the wind hot. He had filled his great-coat pockets with sweeties for her, as though she were still a little girl, and, carrying his portmanteau into the dining-room, immediately unstrapped it on the table to disclose the odds and ends he had collected in his flying visit to the great world of fashion.

"How do you like this?" he inquired, unwrapping a large parcel with pride. "Pretty, isn't it?"

As he spoke he tossed a large quantity of fairy-like, gauzy material on to the table, and looked at her eagerly for her verdict.

"It's just your style!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, "and I said so at once. It caught my eye in a shop window and in I went and bought every inch there was of it. It's just the gauzy, beetlewing-y thing," said I to myself, "for my little girl at home. Do you like it?"

"It is beautiful," she said with an effort. "But there is enough for two or three dresses here."

"I dare say. I bought it all. I didn't want any other woman to have a beetle-wing gown like yours. Let's see how it suits you."

He gathered up a handful and held it against her face, regarding the effect with his head on one side. Soft, deli-

cate, vaporous, it lay in a shimmering cloud around her. She bore the scrutiny as long as it pleased him to look, and then sat down by the table, still fingering it.

"You are too good to me," she said in a low voice.

"I don't know about that," he replied. "I buy you a beetle-wing gown, perhaps, but don't you go and mend my old coats, and sew buttons on my gloves, and keep my house in apple-pie order like the most faithful and devoted little Joan to a rough old Darby? Can I ever repay you, sweetheart, for coming to live with me?"

He caressed her hair tenderly as he spoke, but the next instant his attention was diverted to a tear that fell into the shimmering folds of the beetle-wing fabric, where it lay like a pearl before it dissolved. While he was still staring at this unaccountable phenomenon she covered her face with her hands and more tears dropped slowly through her fingers.

"I wish you had not bought it," she said.

"Why?" demanded the squire.

He thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets and planted his feet far apart—his usual attitude when roused or on the defensive.

"It was too kind—and I am just as happy in the oldest cotton dress," she sobbed.

"That may be. I am not sure that you are happy at all."

He spoke almost sharply, and the change in his tone was so unexpected that she looked up involuntarily. She saw the suspicion she had long dreaded in the kind eyes that were scrutinizing her, and a pang of deadly fear made her heart beat fast.

"I do not know that you are happy at all," he repeated. "I have long had my doubts on that point."

She made no reply, but she leaned her head on her hand and her tears fell fast.

"Luigia," said her husband, standing before her, gentle but resolute, "if you have any trouble—any secret—I charge you to tell it me. I shall not be angry. I only wish to have things straight and true between us."

She sat silent before this demand, broken-down and sobbing.

"If you have any trouble—any fancy for any one—let me know it. Tell me about it whatever it is. Trust me, Luigia. Have I not always been your friend?"

She rose hastily, seemed about to speak, hesitated, then seizing his hand, kissed it impulsively and left the room. He turned and looked after her as she vanished, and a moment afterwards he heard the swift, frantic rush of soft feet upon the stair and a door bolted overhead. Then he sank heavily into the chair she had quitted and dropped his face on to the "beetle-wing stuff" he had brought her with such pride. So the bolt had fallen! The horrible suspicion that had dogged his steps and haunted his happiest moments proved to be reality, the girl-wife whom he so tenderly, faithfully, blindly loved had given her heart away from him, and he was nothing to her in comparison with that other man. No need to tell him who that man was. He knew it—knew it instinctively—had known it some time, though he had thrust the knowledge from him and refused to give it house-room: Luigia was good, Luigia was pure, Luigia was his own faithful wife—no one and nothing could come between them. Again and again had he comforted himself with this assurance when the serpent of suspicion had stung him with poisoned tooth. For he was too shrewd a man not to have seen signs that had filled him with tormenting doubt, signs that he had combated fiercely, but that would not be altogether explained or reasoned away. He had told himself that if he waited and was silent all might yet be well; the fancy was a fleeting one, and would die a natural death if he was wise and kept his own counsel; to bring it forward into the light of day and clothe it in words was to substantiate it, give it reality. And this he had now done. In a moment of heat and impulse he had driven her to extremity, made her tacitly acknowledge what could never be forgotten, what must inevitably widen the already widening breach that lay between their hearts.

"But she didn't lie to me!" he kept saying to himself as he walked about the room in a tumult of emotion; "she

didn't lie—I'm glad of that! She trusted me. She knew I wouldn't be hard and unreasonable; she let me know her secret; she wasn't afraid of me. I'm her friend still—however little else I may be."

He went back to the table, and looked down on the heap of fairy-like fabric over which she had wept but a moment before.

"Poor little soul!" he ejaculated, "it isn't her fault, it's mine—for marrying her! She's young, and I'm old, and it isn't in nature that she should weave romantic dreams around me. I've robbed her of her rightful heritage, put love and romance and all the rest of it out of her reach; and I alone am to blame. Let me be very tender with her, very patient, very wise. Let me, at any rate, be her best *friend*, even if all else is denied me."

Some time afterwards, when he went upstairs to dress for dinner, and was passing to his dressing-room, Luigia came out on to the landing. She was beautifully dressed, perfumed, flushed, but there were still traces of tears about her eyes.

"In silk attire, my dearie!" he quoted, pausing for an instant with a smile. "That is right! Make yourself as lovely as you can, for I am a proud man when you look as you look to-night."

Their eyes met fully, and each read the soul of the other in that glance. She saw that, hide it as he would, there was a wound in his heart that was throbbing with a living pain; and he saw that her tears had not all been for him, and that her thoughts had gone back to the man she loved. He passed on quickly, to hide the grey, sickly pallor that overspread his ruddy face.

In these days Luigia walked long and far, and came back tired out to sit down in the old house and dream away the evening. The exaltation of spirit had long died out, and only the longing remained—more than that, it grew stronger and stronger every day. She railed against herself that she had sent him away. What was there to live for now he was gone? She grew paler than ever, food seemed to choke her, and she scarcely slept at all. The squire

watched her with growing anxiety. She must go away for a change, he said. Where would she like to go?

Nowhere! She would not hear of leaving Rodney. She was not ill; she wanted no change; there was nothing the matter with her? Why did she not eat, then? Why did she not sleep? Oh, she ate and slept well enough—if only he would leave her alone! and her voice had a touch of irritation and impatience in it that was quite new to it.

The days passed—she scarcely knew how. Autumn seemed to her one long monotony of howling winds and weeping skies. It was October, that strange, weird month, when the world hangs between life and death, and the last remnant of summer is chased and chilled by the breath of coming winter. There were still leaves on the trees, but they were shrivelled and discoloured, and the rough westerly wind sweeping over the hills tore them from their branches and whirled them before it in the maddest of frolics, till it gave up the game and left them to rot in the roadside ditches; the copses were full of dying leaves too, and the grass was rank and wet. The ploughshares were out, passing silently along the brow of the uplying fields, where the rich, damp earth lay soft and dark against the cloudy sky. There was an ominous, brooding air hanging over all; the world was sullen and sad and moody, dressing itself in browns and greys for the long dark winter that was drawing near on the wings of the fierce north wind.

The dripping trees, the sodden earth, the chill, damp air suited well with her mood. The world was dying, even as her youth and hope and life were dying; desolation and decay were all around her—the oozing earth, the rotting leaves, the heavy mist lying in the hollows, were all in keeping with her own melancholy. There was an agony of longing in her heart that she could not utter; but there was something akin to it in the weird autumn weather, and morning, noon, and late into the evening she was out on the moors, or through the woods, alone, wet, exhausted, but still feverishly restless.

Once she took a train to Mackworth, a little place ten miles off, upon the coast, ostensibly to pay a call, but in

reality to feast her eyes upon the sea. After enduring half an hour's martyrdom in a stiff and formal drawing-room, she escaped, and went to a lonely part of the beach, where she sat down. There she remained for two whole hours, looking across the sea to the horizon. There was a bleak northeast wind blowing, that would have chilled any one who had not fever in her veins; but she did not feel cold. It was the sea!—the sea that she had come expressly to look at, to touch, to smell! Out there, somewhere beyond the line of the sky, farther than she could see, a ship was sailing —sailing away from her. Her voice could not reach it; her longing was vain. She stretched out her arms into the empty air, and cried aloud—

"O God, keep him safe; keep down the storms and wind. Let me, at any rate, live in the same world with him. Give me that—if only that."

But her arms fell to her sides again, and, with a shudder, she hid her face. Her heart ached with an emptiness that seemed more than she could bear. The hundreds and thousands of miles that lay between them drove her frantic. What was there left? Only wind and rain and desolation for evermore.

She went home shivering and numb. Her husband met her in the hall, and, taking her by the hand, led her into his study. A cheery fire glowed upon the hearth, and warmth and light played around the room. But there was no warmth or light in either of their hearts.

"Luigia," he said slowly, looking into her woe-begone face, and chafing her benumbed hand, "can't you tell me about it?"

She lifted her eyes dumbly, and they were heavy, blank, dreary.

"*Can't* you tell me?" he cried passionately. "Have I ever been hard and selfish with you? Wouldn't I give my life any day to make you happy? Anything but secrecy—anything but fear of me, Luigia."

She sat down deliberately in the armchair that stood on the hearth, and stared into the fire with unseeing eyes.

"I have been to look at the sea," she said in a dull mono-

tone, "and I went because I could not keep away. It seemed to take me a little nearer to *him*. I ought to be sorry to tell you this, but, as it is, I don't seem to care much. There is a stone in the place of my heart. I am very wicked, I know, but I don't mind about that either."

There was a moment or two of silence before the squire spoke. When he did, his voice was shaken with emotion.

"It isn't your fault—you can't help it—it's only natural." He cleared his throat, and went on less huskily, "If it weren't for my conscience, I'd go and do something to set you free, you may be sure of that, Luigia. I'd give my life —ay, a thousand lives—to make you happy. But I've a conscience and a God, Luigia, and I daren't go against them, not even for you, you know. It'll have to go on and on, I'm afraid, till death comes mercifully and puts an end to me, and for that I'll pray day and night, as I've never prayed before. I can promise you that."

He put his hand heavily on her shoulder, and went on—

"Bear with me a year or two, if you can. It won't be longer, I think—I feel that to-day. I've had my death-blow, if that is any consolation to you. And in heaven, my poor child"—he looked at her with a quivering smile on his poor pale face: a smile such as heroes wear when the knife cuts into the living flesh, and they will not utter a groan—"in heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage. Take comfort in that."

And, turning quickly, he left the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ROAD TO THE END OF THE WORLD.

In the end of October the squire found he would have to go to Paris for a week or ten days on business. He deliberated over the going some time. Would Luigia go too? If so, he would make arrangements for them both, at once.

No, Luigia would *not* go—she was tired of travelling, tired of new places; she only wanted to be quiet. Why did he look at her like that? There was nothing the matter—nothing whatever, and she left the room with the impatient frown he was learning to know and dread.

He deliberated over this journey, and weighed its *pros* and *cons* by night and by day. He could not make up his mind. His instinct told him to stay at home and look after Luigia; his reason told him that it would mean the failure of a great scheme and the loss of much money. For his own part he would not have hesitated, but Daubigny and other friends who were involved in the transaction wrote to him urging him strongly to go, and at last he made up his mind to do so. There was nothing much to be gained by staying, beyond the pain of seeing that look on her face that had come to it lately, and accompany him she would not. Never before had he known her so determined. But, for once, her soft yielding will was inflexible as steel.

He went, and she stayed. He went with regret, with secret apprehension; yet he did not know what it was he feared. If Luigia was unhappy, she probably knew her own cure better than he did. At any rate, he could not force her into any plan of action against her will.

Luigia was left alone, to fume and chafe and beat against the bars of her prison. The demon of restlessness possessed her, and drove her wandering through the house and out into the dripping fields and lanes. She went down to the little hollow in the wood, where they had parted; it was full of rotting leaves and heavy mist. She walked out on to the moor, which stretched for miles before her, away to the cities and lands of the East to which he had gone. She wandered up into the attics and watched the road to London, leaning against the wall, looking from the same window where, some hundred and fifty years before, a certain Anne Rodney had watched and wept and waited for the faithless lover who never came. It was the same old story, only that this time it was *she* who had sent him away, and now—oh! now she would have given all she had or ever hoped to have in heaven and earth to have him back again. She did not

know where he was, she had told him not to write. Sometimes she wrote him letters which she tore up again; sometimes she told herself if she only knew where he was, she would go to him. But she never wrote and she never went, and the skies went on weeping, and her heart grew heavier.

One day—a dull, heavy, melancholy day—when no ray of sun broke through the sullen sky, and the air was still, she went out to walk on the moor. It suited her mood—the moor. It was bare, melancholy, deserted; it was without boundary, and stretched for miles—farther than she could walk or see. Near the house there were deep lanes full of rotting leaves: these stifled her; the dripping woods oppressed her; she avoided looking at them. She walked fast, with her eyes on the ground; her skirts got wet and muddy, her feet were soaked, but, contrary to custom, she was indifferent to such trifles, and took no trouble to avoid the pools of water lying in the road. Her hands were bare and cold.

One or two country people, meeting her in the lanes, dropped a curtsey, or touched their forelocks to "the squire's lady." Perhaps they wondered why she chose to walk on such a day when she had carriages at her disposal, and she herself could hardly have given them a reason. She had no aim beyond the desire do something—anything, except sit down and think.

A farmer's gig passed her, with a young farmer and his bride in it. The girl had the skirt of her dress thrown over her head, and was laughing up at him from beneath the shelter; the stout brown mare was making the best of her way home to the cosy farmstead among the hills, where tea and firelight were awaiting them. Luigia looked after them with envy in her heart, and the young farmer looked back at her.

"Did 'ee see how wet she wer'?" he said to the girl at his side. "She's not so snug as thee."

After a time the road left the region of woods and lanes, and ran out into the moor, dark with ling and bramble. Here and there a black pool reflected the cloudy sky; far away, at the foot of the hills, the pines were gathered in

sombre masses. It was both silent and solitary—not a wayfarer to be seen, not a bird to be heard in all the wide expanse around. The road, shining with puddles from last night's heavy rain, stretched across it as far as she could see, with here and there a white signpost at the cross-roads. There was no sun; the air was heavy and chill.

It was getting late, dusk was closing in, and she paused for a moment before turning back. Why should she turn back? What was there to go back for? To be sure it had come on to rain heavily, and already her skirts were soaked through; but what of that? It was better to walk through mist and rain in the free air than to sit in one of those silent rooms at home and look into the fire. Looking into the fire drives one mad with longing!—out here there was at least something to do. She would go on still further. And she went on, the mist gathering in around her, and the rain falling faster.

In the distance she heard the wheels of another farmer's gig coming along the road, this time from the opposite direction. Presently it emerged from the mist, its lamps flashing, its horse splashing cheerfully through the puddles. Was it a farmer's gig? The horse was a beautiful thoroughbred, and she knew that white-stocking'd forefoot well! The man who was driving wore a white mackintosh cape. She knew that cape too! Her heart gave a great throb, and then stood still. She stood still herself at the roadside, and awaited—she knew not what.

The dog-cart came on, and she looked up at the man's face. The collar of his cape was turned up, his hat was low on his brows, the rain was driving into his eyes—there was little of them to be seen, but she knew him! In a moment he had passed, with a flashing of lights and a splashing of mud. He pulled up a few yards past her, and looked back at her dark, stationary figure, standing defenceless in the rain.

"If you are going my way, I can give you a lift," he called out.

"If you please, my lord," said the groom at the back, touching his hat, "it was Mrs. Rodney."

"*What?*" cried Lord Egan. The next instant he had flung the reins to the groom, and was out in the muddy road and back beside Luigia.

She still stood where he had passed her, her heart throbbing wildly. He came up to her and took her two wet hands a moment, his face alive with a great joy.

"*You!*" he cried. "I did not know you—actually passed you without looking."

She could not speak. She tried to say something, but her lips were faint with joy, and she only felt like crying.

"What are you doing here?" he said, facing her and keeping his back to the manservant, who discreetly turned his eyes in the opposite direction. "Shall I drive you home?"

She shook her head.

"Then I'll walk too. I'll send the man on. Martin"—calling out to the groom—"you can drive on home. I shall walk."

"Yes, my lord," said Martin; and with an immovable face he touched his hat again and respectfully set about carrying out his master's orders. But as he did so he winked at one of the puddles in the road with an air that seemed to say he drew his own conclusions from such a proceeding.

The dog-cart grew smaller and smaller on the moorland road, till it vanished in the mist and darkness.

Before it had gone a dozen yards, Lord Egan put his arms round her, and kissed her eyes and mouth and hands and hair; and Luigia foolishly began to cry.

"My poor little darling!" he said, "did you want me so badly?"

"I thought you would never come any more," she sobbed.

"Did you?" He almost laughed. "Why, what have I got to care for or think of or live for but you? Did you think I could stay away for ever? I didn't. I knew from the first I should come back. I obeyed you, darling, as long as I could, but you must remember I am only a man, and men are mortal!"

He was laughing, and she was crying! His face and

voice were full of rapture, triumph, joy, and for the time he was completely her master. The old subjection had died out; his eyes were flashing and his actions decided. She felt small and feeble beside him, and as though she had no will of her own.

"Look here," he said, pointing to her wet skirt. "What a state you are in—drenched to the skin! And your feet, no doubt, soaked through. How dare you do such foolish things?"

He seemed almost angry, yet she loved him all the better for the proprietorship he claimed over her.

"You will put this on at once, and come home."

He took off his mackintosh cape and threw it round her, buttoning the large button under her chin with clumsy fingers. She resisted. Was it likely she was going to take his things from him—when she was already soaked through, too? And was it likely *he* was going to wear it while she walked at his side defenceless? So, in the middle of the muddy road, with the rain sweeping across the moor and drenching them, they quarrelled over the cape, and Luigia forgot her tears and he got his way.

What had happened to the bleak and dreary moor? All at once it had become warm and homelike, a very heaven on earth! It still rained, her feet were still wet, but she was no longer cold or tired or lonely. He put his arm round her waist in the approved lovers' style, since there was no one but the donkeys to see, and they walked through the puddles together, oblivious and happy. They told each other of their longing, of the blankness of the days, of the wretched, wakeful nights, of their fevered dreams and the hateful moment of awakening. She asked him where he had been, what he had been doing, whether he had been gay. What did it matter where he had been or what he had done, he answered her, since, wherever it was, whatever it was, he had only thought of her? The world of the mind was their only world when they were apart.

Then he touched on a point of still greater moment. He had come back, he said, for one thing only—to take her away with him. They could not live without each other,

could they? Had she not found it so? Honour? What is honour when one loves? God had made them care for each other; only the law of the world stood between them. What did it matter what the world thought? Love such as theirs was a higher law than any marriage tie. There were lands he would take her to, where no one would know their story —beautiful scenes that he longed to show her; there was a life of perfect love and happiness for them both if she would only speak the one little word. Would she? Would she? He kissed the rebellious, silent mouth, and the kisses were more eloquent pleading than any words.

"It is idiocy—this wilful throwing away of the only thing worth having," he cried.

She looked away to the black pools, swamped and desolate.

"We tried to do our duty," she said, "but duty is the hardest and dreariest thing in the world."

"And love the best and sweetest!"

She pushed back her wet hair from her eyes irresolutely.

"Don't take your hands away. What does your hair matter? There is only me to see, and I love it any way—tidy or untidy. Forget everything, Luigia, but me and what I have come back to ask you."

"I am thinking of it—it is an awful thing!"

"Not awful at all! It is just you and I—no one else at all. There is nothing awful in that."

"I am afraid——"

"Afraid of me?"

"No, not of you. Of everything else."

"But I will take care of you. What are other people to us if we have each other?"

"It is not other people—it is—because it is *wrong*."

"Wrong! To me it is right, wise, good, lovely. I see no drawbacks. But even if I did I would defy them. Is not this love of ours worth suffering for a little?"

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, it is worth suffering for," he cried, "since we shall suffer together." He stooped and laid his cheek against

hers, and for a moment held her so tightly she could not move. "You and I against the whole world, darling."

"Yes, it is worth suffering for," she said, with a throb of love in her voice.

"It is worth damnation!" he exclaimed passionately.

They walked on to the edge of the moor, he pleading his cause with passionate vehemence, she feeling her decision being taken out of her hands, yet not daring to give an ultimate answer. There they parted to meet again to-morrow. He was to meet her at Mrs. Frayling's, where she was going in the afternoon to pay a call, and she would let him know his fate then. No, she would not see him alone anywhere—not till she knew herself which way it was to be. Whether he liked it or not, he had to bow to her decision, and they parted in the rain to meet again to-morrow.

The evening she spent alone, sitting over the fire, staring into its embers. Every now and then the wood ash dropped lightly from between the bars on to the hearth, and every time it dropped she lifted her head and looked at the clock ticking away the fateful minutes. It was an awful thing to decide, and, whichever way she looked at it, seemed almost equally impossible.

That night on going to her room she dismissed her maid, and, sitting down before the toilet-table on which two tall candles burned, tilted the glass and looked full and steadily at her own image reflected in it. It was a wild, white, frantic face, with trembling lips and dilated eyes, a face that bore in every line of it the token of a desperate fate.

"My God!" she cried aloud, as she covered her face with her hands, "what will the end be? Yet, whatever it is, I will pay the penalty."

She dropped her head on to her arms on the toilet-table, and when at last she rose to undress, the candles had burned low down into their sockets, and the light of a new day gleamed through the lattice.

The next day she drove into Tadcaster to make her promised call on Mrs. Frayling. It was her reception day, and there were many visitors. She left her furs in the warm

hall, and was ushered into a still warmer drawing-room, full of people. Mrs. Frayling came through the flickering firelight to meet her. Without looking round she was conscious of a man's figure leaning against the mantelpiece, half in firelight, half in shadow. He bowed to her across the room, and went on talking to Maggie Frayling. She sat down on the sofa beside her hostess.

"*Such* a change in the weather!" began Mrs. Frayling, cooing in her ear. "After all that rain it is quite delightful to have it dry, isn't it? But my husband says it will rain again when this wind dies down. We shall be quite flooded out, I say. Autumn in the country is so—— Oh yes, we hear constantly from Eda. She is *so* happy, dear girl! They are coming for Christmas, we hope, when I shall *certainly* bring her over to see you."

Luigia smiled and listened and answered, and the babble of conversation flowed on in a ceaseless stream of commonplaces, while the fate of two people in the room hung trembling in the balance.

When she rose to go, Lord Egan came forward out of the shadow. He must go too, he said, and he would be happy to see Mrs. Rodney to her carriage. At the same moment General Sir Thomas and Lady Grantly were announced, and claimed the hostess' attention. Lord Egan and Luigia left the room together.

In the hall she stopped to take up her wraps, and he put them round her.

"How did you come?" he asked her, trying to catch a glimpse of her face, an attempt she frustrated by keeping it in shadow.

"I drove in the pony-carriage."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Is there room for me?"

"Oh, there is room," she returned carelessly.

The words and manner were indifferent enough—for there were servants standing near—but such as they were they brought a flash of joy and triumph into his eyes, a flash that was instantly subdued.

He went out with her on to the doorstep, beside which the ponies stood impatiently whisking their tails as they waited. One of the major's grooms stood at their heads.

"I will drive," said Luigia.

"Won't your hands be cold?"

"No; I have my driving-gloves—or rather *you* have them, I see."

He slipped them over her other gloves as they stood together on the doorstep; then she got into the little carriage, and he arranged the fur over her knees. In another moment they were off, the ponies trotting briskly, the groom looking after them with his jaw dropping in amazement. But what did they care for him, or for the lodge-keeper, or any of the people they might pass on the road? It was but the beginning of the end.

They neither of them spoke till they had passed the lodge and were out in the moonlit road, overshadowed on one side by skeleton trees, and on the other by a park paling. The air was keen, the wind wild and boisterous—it was rushing past them like a live thing gone mad—there was a bright, clear moon rising.

They drove rapidly and in silence. They and the wind seemed to be running a race, and Luigia's heart was running a race too, a madder race than either. The trees and the park palings were tearing past them, only the moon was steady.

Suddenly he pulled her close to him and kissed her rapturously.

"My beautiful darling!" he whispered.

"I cannot guide the ponies if you do that," she said, with a nervous little laugh.

"Then don't guide them. Look at me, Luigia, not over there."

"How can I——"

"But you must, you shall. Your eyes are mine; they shall not look at anything but me. I want to see them; I have not seen them for ages. I am hungry and thirsty for love—for you——"

She turned a little, and with one hand touched his cheek,

stroking it almost as she would have caressed a child's. He laid it against her shoulder and was silent.

A little pause. A dark bend in the road, with black shadows on both sides, and a lull in the wind. She felt him trembling. He was quiet, but it was a treacherous quietness —the couch of the creature that is going to spring, the lull that comes before a storm.

They came out into the moonlight again, and he could see her profile against the clear sky, the soft fur at her throat fluttering in the wind.

Suddenly, roughly, he threw his arms round her in a passionate embrace. She half rose, with a stifled cry, flinging out her hands; the ponies shied, and ran on to the rough ground at the roadside.

"Oh! what are you doing?" she cried.

But the reins were taken from her by a strong hand, the other held her fast. The ponies righted themselves and flew on like the wind; the treetops were swaying darkly against a sea of moonlit clouds.

"Are you frightened, my beautiful one?" he said, bending over her. "Why, you are in my arms!"

She *was* frightened, yet there was a strange and desperate joy clamouring through her fear.

"Where are we going?" she cried, as they flew past the cross-road leading to the Manor.

"It is only a longer way round."

"Oh! where are we going?" she cried again, breathlessly.

He held her fast, lifting his face, pale with reckless excitement, to the moon.

"What does it matter where we go?" he cried. "Anywhere. Away—to the end of the world, and beyond!"

The long road stretched before them, white with moonlight, black with shadows, solitary, unending. And to Luigia it seemed that it led indeed to the end of the world, and beyond!

That night she dreamed a strange dream. All seemed hurry and confusion around her; there was a rushing of wind and of wheels bearing her into unknown lands, and

with it a sensation of fear mingled with abandoned delight. And as the turmoil and the hurricane waxed fiercer, and she was borne yet more swiftly away, she turned and looked back at what she was leaving. The mist and the darkness were gathering fast and closing in behind her like an impenetrable veil, shutting out the past and everything she had hitherto known. Then she realized that she was journeying to a land from whence there is no returning. Once over the brink of the dividing stream, and the waters of a river as remorseless as death would bear her away on their dark bosom to where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and an unavailing, fathomless despair.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO MAGDALENS.

THERE followed a week of delirium. The squire was detained longer than he had expected, and would not be home till the tenth, so he wrote. In the mean time Luigia and Lord Egan lived through a week such as the world had never held for them before, would never hold for them again. Phantoms crossed their paths, touched them, looked at them, but they were not real. The only reality was their intoxicating world of love.

But why describe it? Human beings have no right to go mad over each other, and when they do they are invariably punished for it—punished as surely as the reaping follows the sowing and the fruit the seed. The wages of folly and sin are paid to the uttermost farthing by a Hand that knows no shadow of turning. And this law it is that is the salvation of the world.

During this week they made their preparations for the flight that was to be the beginning of a new life—the life of love. But on the very eve of that flight, Fate stepped in and prevented it. She received a hurried letter from Lord Egan, telling her his sister was dangerously ill in Corinth,

and that he was summoned by telegram to go out at once. It was terribly unfortunate, but there was no alternative but to go. In the mean time, she must trust in him and wait; he would come back as soon as he could, and then everything they had planned should take place without delay. There were protestations of eternal faithfulness, and words of passionate love at the end of the note, but her heart fainted when she read it. Fate seemed to be turning against her, the sky was dark, there were rocks and storms ahead, a forewarning of shipwreck pressing ominously on her heart. But what was worse than all just then was meeting the squire's eyes! It seemed to her a thing that positively *could not be done*, yet there was no help for it. The earth does not open and swallow us up at our desire, nor is there any way of eluding the eye of a just man when our heart is black with treachery against him. Luigia had to go through with it, and therein justly lay part of her punishment. It was an ordeal greater than could be borne, she felt, but it had to be borne, all the same. She thought it would kill her, but it did not. She almost wished it would.

It was dusk when he came, and she was alone in the dark parlour waiting for him. The whole of that day had been one of untold misery; she had either shivered over the fires, or roamed feverishly through the house and garden. Now he had come, and she was forced to meet him. She saw him driving up in the dark, she heard his voice in the hall, but she did not go out to meet him. She stood trembling on the hearth. At last the door-handle turned, and he entered the room.

"Well, sweetheart?" he said, coming forward and holding out his hands; but his voice had lost the old hearty ring, and his eyes were not full of the gladness with which he used to look at her.

For one wild moment she thought of throwing herself at his feet and confessing all, calling down his just vengeance upon her guilty head, but the impulse passed even as she raised her eyes to look at him, and her manner was calmer even than usual as she gave him her hand.

He drew her nearer and kissed her once on the cheek. She shivered and turned away. He sat down in his elbow-chair on the hearth with a weary air that was new to him. "It is very cold this evening," he said, holding out his hand to the blaze. "I don't know how it is, I used to enjoy the keen air, but this year it seems to chill me to the bone."

She knelt down on the hearth and swept up the ashes with the little hearth broom. She kept her back turned to him. In a few minutes she made some excuse to leave the room.

It was like escaping from the torture-house, this getting into the hall, away from the kind old man who had never done her any injury beyond loving her. And the going back into his presence seemed impossible. It would have been easier, she thought, to have walked barefooted over red-hot ploughshares like the martyrs of old, than to have sat through dinner and the long quiet evening with her husband. But it came, and it had to be done. She had no welcome to give him; he saw and felt that in the most sensitive place in his heart, and the long lapses of silence that fell between them were moments of acutest suffering to them both.

The next day and the next passed, and still she did not get used to the torture-house or find its agonies any more endurable. Her nerves were on the stretch, an inward fever consumed her night and day; she could neither eat nor sleep. She had altered; was not well, people said. She did not admit it when they questioned her, but that was nothing. It was not natural to be so pale, so quiet, so absent; she had changed wonderfully during the last month or so. One night at a dinner-party she fainted. People talked about it afterwards. They had noticed something strange about her manner all the evening; she did not hear them when they spoke to her; the expression of her eyes was vague, her smile shadowy, and she was wonderfully white, even to her lips and ears and hands. The man who took her in to dinner had started half a dozen different subjects in vain; she had only answered "yes" or "no," and

helped herself to trifling morsels that she never ate. She had drunk water continually, and crumbled her bread ceaselessly with pretty trembling fingers. By degrees he had come to understand that he was in the presence of some great tragedy, the nature of which he could not fathom. He looked across at the squire once or twice with a passing wonder as to whether he was to be regarded in the light of a domestic tyrant and wife-beater. Did he ill-use this pale, lovely, trembling girl in private? What had he done to make her eyes look like that?

Then she had fainted—risen up from her place with a little inarticulate cry, and fallen headlong on the floor behind him. They had carried her out, and he never saw her again. Afterwards he made inquiries as to her history. She had no history. She was the Squire of Rodney's young wife, and she was not very strong, that was all. Oh, yes, they were extremely happy together, a most devoted couple, in spite of the disparity in their ages. There was nothing of that sort whatever. She was only very delicate, although she always would persist in saying she was so strong.

She was taken home, and her maid undressed her. The squire came in on tiptoe once to look at her. She was lying with closed eyes and hair unbound, her lips as pale as the dead white silk of her dinner-gown flung over the chair at the bedside. He stole away again as the maid came to hang it in the cupboard, and went downstairs. There, in the room below, he sat alone with bowed head, and his hands tightly clenched on the arms of his elbow-chair. His dog's faithful nose was laid affectionately in silent, instinctive sympathy on his knee, but she received no caress, no endearing word. He was wrestling with an anguish too deep and bitter to allow of room for anything else. Luigia did not love him, never had loved him, yet was tied to him by bonds no human hand could sever. The wound to his pride was great, but greater far was the pain of the knowledge that he must stand for ever between her and her happiness.

"Please God I may die," he muttered again and again in a sort of involuntary prayer; but even as he said it the

strength and vigour within him rose up in protest and claimed their inheritance to many another long year.

"My mother was eighty-two and my grandfather over ninety," groaned the poor squire to himself, "and the chances are I shall live to be older than either of them—a curse and a misery to myself as well as to her! God knows how gladly I would drop out of life to give her happiness!"

His head drooped lower, his grey hair resting against the little frilled cushion Luigia had worked and given him on his birthday, and which always hung by a ribbon over the back of his special chair. His attitude was so hopeless, so despondent, that the dog, accustomed to a master who was brisk, alert, and cheery, sprang up and licked his face with a short, sharp bark of inquiry and surprise. The squire pushed her aside with an impatient hand, and rising, paced the room for an hour or more in brooding silence.

Luigia battled resolutely with the nervous excitement that possessed her, and rose, white and exhausted, from her bed next day. She refused to acknowledge that she was ill, repulsed all attentions, and only begged to be let alone.

She was waiting for a letter, always waiting for a letter that never came. Sometimes she owned that not hearing from him was only what was to be expected, since correspondence was not a thing to be risked between them. The fact of a letter coming into the village for Mrs. Rodney from Corinth would spread like wildfire through the place in less than half a day, and cause no end of gossip. This she fully realized; yet at times it seemed to her he had no desire to write. Surely he could have found a way of communicating with her if he had wanted to do so. What will not a man in love contrive if hard put to it? But no word came; the suspense turned her sick, and the alternative hope and dread were fast settling down into despair. If he deserted her what would be her fate? Ah, but she dared not even think of that—it could not be, it *could not be!*

In the solitude of her own room she paced backwards and forwards, like some panting, striving creature dragging at its chain. Resentment against him rose in her heart;

she told herself she hated him. He was a coward, a traitor, a liar, a thief—what name was bad enough ?

"I scorn him, I hate him, I despise him!" she cried fiercely, sweeping backwards and forwards through the room with her black brows gathered, a storm in her eyes. "Yes, mad as I have been, the madness is past now, and I have no shred of feeling left for him but hatred!—detestation!—scorn!"

She told herself this many times, but at others a mere word, a chance touch on the old chord of memories, set her trembling with the old longing just to see his face and hear his voice once more.

"If only I could die!" she moaned to herself at such moments, as she hung cowering over the fire, with her face hidden in her hands.

But death does not come to those who cry out for it, or the world would be thinly peopled indeed, and the tragedy of life a thing to smile at. She had to live as others have to live—through days and nights of anguish. They came and went, and she dragged herself through them as best she could.

A little event occurred once in the village that attracted general attention for the time being. A girl went wrong with a soldier—a married man with several children—and when he threw her over she tried to drown herself in a pond, but was rescued and brought back to be stormed at and turned out of doors by her indignant father. For two days every one was talking about the matter. Mrs. Frayling, who knew the man well, since he was in her husband's regiment, was also deeply interested. She happened to drive into Rodney and call on Luigia during the thick of the gossip. It was a wet and cheerless afternoon, and as the oak parlour was the cosiest room in the house on a winter's day, she was taken up the sweet-smelling, cedar-lined staircase to Luigia's private room. There she found her sipping tea with Mrs. Harburton.

The conversation turned of course on the village tragedy. Mrs. Frayling was indignant, disgusted, shocked, horrified: the girl was a worthless, degraded creature; the man, whom

she knew well, had been enticed and led astray by her, of course; it was all very dreadful, and had upset her terribly and made her feel quite ill. Such a mad thing to do too, to try to drown herself like that! The children were already afraid to pass the pond coming home from school in the dusk, she heard; it was almost a pity, though of course it sounded dreadful to say it, that she had not succeeded in her attempt, for what in the world is a ruined creature like that to do with the rest of her life?

"I can't help being sorry for the poor thing myself," put in Mrs. Harbuton, mildly.

"Sorry! She isn't worth it," cried Mrs. Frayling, ruffling her plumes with virtuous indignation. "One must draw hard-and-fast lines, and I always say that when public opinion becomes lax, society falls to pieces altogether."

Luigia was lying back in a deep chair, listening. She held a peacock screen between her face and the glow of the fire, and the foot that peeped from beneath her skirt was moving restlessly, like a little animal in pain.

"What is going to be done with the wretched little fool?" she inquired contemptuously.

"Oh, I don't know—ship her off to Australia, I suggest."

"Then she will throw herself overboard."

"And if she does, could any sensible person regret it?" Mrs. Frayling lifted her furs preparatory for departure. "I am sure I don't wish to be hard, but——"

"Leave her to me," said Luigia, tying and untying the ribbon on her fan. "I will see to her."

"She is not worth much trouble——" began Mrs. Frayling; but Luigia laid down her fan, and leaning forward into the full glow of the firelight, spoke with sudden, restrained intensity of feeling.

"Believe me, I despise and scorn her fully as much as you do. I despise and scorn any woman who flings herself away on a man. But she has her punishment, most assuredly she has her punishment—it will be hard enough in any case, probably harder than she will know how to bear!"

She dropped back again into the depth of the great down-

cushion, and lifted the screen between the fire-glow and her face. Mrs. Frayling regarded her with languid eyes of inquiry.

"Do not let us attempt to judge the Magdalens of this world," she added, "until we have some understanding of their temptation and their love."

"Love!" ejaculated Mrs. Frayling, with a little shiver. "Pray do not use the word in connection with so low a thing!"

Luigia did not defend her use of the word, and Mrs. Frayling rose to depart.

"I do not believe a woman is ever justified in taking a lenient view of immorality," she said.

"Oh, neither do I." Luigia rose too. "Only one cannot help being just a little sorry for the wretched creature. One is sorry for the moth when it flutters into the flame. It is its own fault, of course; but one is inclined to forget that in looking at the little heap of blackened dust that will never be good for anything again."

She gave her soft hand in parting, and Mrs. Frayling murmured, "Very sweet of you—very sweet, indeed!" and left the room and went down the cedar-lined staircase to her carriage, thinking to herself that, gentle and fascinating as young Mrs. Rodney was, she held dangerously lax views on certain subjects, and was altogether a person difficult to understand.

That evening Luigia slipped on her gipsy cloak and took her way quickly through the dark garden and the wood beyond, to a cottage in the quarry-lane. The cottage stood alone in the shelter of the quarry, down a long, straggling lane. There was no light in the window, the door was shut, and after tapping on it twice and receiving no answer, she pushed it open and went in. There was a girl sitting by the dying ashes on the hearth, a girl who turned, rose with a frightened, hunted look, and drew back into the darkness.

Luigia acted on instinct. She gave no reason for coming; she only went forward with outstretched hands, and took hold of her.

"Oh! Jessie," she cried, in a voice broken and choked with emotion, "tell me about it—tell me about it."

The girl was silent, doubting that she heard aright. She felt the touch of kind, clasping hands, she heard the quivering voice uttering its one little sentence of sympathy, and she knew that, unlikely as it seemed, here was indeed a friend. The squire's young wife, in her soft rustling dress, with the perfume of violets about her, had come to her like an angel from heaven in the hour of her direst need. She had heard enough of the blackness of her crime, the depth of her disgrace, and had hardened her heart to it, but this was the first time any one had spoken to her in tones of pity. Still she made an effort in her pride to keep aloof.

"You'd better not touch the likes o' me, ma'am," she said, dragging away her hands; but Luigia held them fast.

"Don't send me away—tell me about it, for I can understand."

"Oh, no one understands," cried the girl wildly, "for they don't love as I do. It's only him as I care for, and he's tired of me, and the sin and the disgrace is nothing to that, and I wish I was dead, I do."

She burst out sobbing, and leaned her face against the wall; but Luigia took her in her arms, and holding her closely, wept too.

"*I* understand, Jessie—*I* understand," she was saying again and again. And then, mysteriously, instinctively, the girl began to feel that the squire's young wife was no better than she was, that it was *sympathy*, not *pity* that was being offered her; and casting aside all barriers in their common woe, the two fallen women wept and clung together.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHRISTMAS AT THE MANOR.

Two days before Christmas, Belle arrived on a flying visit. She wrote before to announce it, sure of a welcome. She did so love a regular, old-fashioned Christmas, she said in her letter—the roasting of oxen, and the burning of yule logs, and the drinking of wassail bowl or whatever it was—and besides, she longed to see them all again. How were all her old friends? Was Mrs. Harburton quite well? Had Lord Egan cured that tiresome sister of his yet and come home? Where was Sir Ralph? Mama had heard rumours of his being in London, but that seemed scarcely likely, or he would surely have called on them. Might she run down for a few days? London was very gay, all their friends were in town, and she was full of engagements, but Rodney, dear little Rodney, held her heart and she was longing to see it again.

The squire met her at the little wayside station as before, but instead of the gay and debonair knickerbocker, he was now wrapped to the ears and down to the heels in a huge driving coat, with capacious pockets and half a dozen capes. There was a sprig of holly in his buttonhole.

"A merry Christmas to you!" he cried, as he kissed her blooming cheek.

"How disgraceful of you!" she exclaimed, laughing and looking round her with an attempt at a blush.

"Oh, there's no one but the pines to see. Even the cows have departed."

"The porter——"

"Oh, he's one of the family—son of my gardener, my dear. Come, now, how will you go? in the dogcart with me, or in the fly with your maid and the luggage? It's bitingly cold on the moors."

"How can you ask? As though I couldn't defy any amount of cold in all these furs! But you are not looking well yourself. How is that?"

"I got a chill the other day," he returned carelessly. "It's nothing!" And with an evident desire to sheer off the subject, he led the way to the dogcart in the road.

But Belle slipped her arm in his, and looked him anxiously in the face. He was certainly older, greyer, more worn than when she had seen him last, four months ago, and the wrinkles were deeper and closer than she remembered them. He talked away as cheerily as ever, but there was a change in his voice too, the ring of heartiness was absent from it, and he laughed but seldom.

Perhaps the change lay only in her imagination after all, and she was affected more than she was aware by the cold and dreary look of all around her. Perhaps something of the gloom that now hung over the once smiling landscape had fallen on the happy, hearty squire, and transformed him into an old and saddened man.

How different it all looked in the cold, grey gloom of a winter's afternoon! There was snow lying thickly on the moors, and in patches on the black gorse-bushes; it covered the hills in a white sheet, and blocked the roads and walls and hedges and ditches till it was difficult to trace their lines. There was more up in the air too, for the old woman of the fairy tales up in the skies was plucking her Christmas geese, and a mass of feathers was ready to fall at her first word. Over the hills swept the bleak north wind in an icy blast, rattling the ivy leaves in the barren hedges, and shaking the leafless trees with a rough hand as it rushed past to die away with a howl and a shriek on the ragged line of the horizon. The landscape was certainly cheerless enough, with its deserted fields, its cold, dark sky, its lonely farmhouses cowering beneath their weight of snow, the silent village, where, here and there, a solitary wayfarer pushed his way with muffled steps through the drifts. The place she remembered as gay with sunshine, butterflies and flowers, where the air resounded with the rippling of brooks, the humming of bees, and the whir of the watermill, was now silent and deserted—a wide, white waste of land and hills beneath a sullen sky.

Yet there was some life and frolic left in the world, after

all. Through the leafless trees of the Abbey Park, as they drove past the palings, could be seen a throng of skaters skimming over the ice in cosy, fur-lined garments, while the ring of steel and the sound of gay voices went far and wide on the keen air. Farther along they overtook the Maxwell and Harburton boys and girls, skates in hand, returning to tea after a long day on the ice, and, rosy and smiling, they waved a greeting to Belle. Then came the cheery lights in the cottages as evening closed in, and lastly the Manor House itself, with the ruddy glow of great wood fires streaming from the diamond-paned casements into the gloom and darkness of a rapidly waning winter's afternoon.

And when the hall door was opened, what a haven of warmth and light appeared within! The dogs ran out to welcome them, and Luigia herself, in a big red apron, with holly and scissors in hand, came out on to the doorstep too. Behind her, on the floor, lay great heaps of holly and yew not yet hung, and peeping from the door of the dining-room the shy, smiling faces of Bab and Nan Barber, the squire's great nieces from the parsonage on the moors. They came out to be introduced to the tall, handsome young lady, swathed in sealskin, who alarmed them by her grand manner, and then, when Luigia took her upstairs for tea and to warm her frozen toes, they seized Uncle Tom on either side and made him help them find sly places in which to hang the boughs of mistletoe.

Again the pretty low-ceilinged bedroom with its wood fire kindling in the basket-grate, and the fresh, sweet smell of lavender-scented hangings. History repeats itself, and once again Belle stood with conscious vanity before the mirror unpinning her hat, while Luigia watched her from the background. She was plumper, fairer, more blooming than ever, and in the best possible spirits.

"I've had a lovely time in Nice," she was saying, as she patted her hair into shape with dimpled, jewelled hands, "and I told you in my last letter about the Count turning up, didn't I? Wasn't it odd? He went about with us everywhere, and was most devoted, and mama liked him im-

mensely. He wouldn't talk about you, though. Had you given him his *congé*?"

"Yes, I had given him his *congé*."

"Did he care a little too much? That is really shocking, you know, my dear—and you a married woman! But I always fancied there might be something a little naughty about that musical friendship of yours. It is quite the correct thing for married women to flirt, of course, but you always seem too much of a mouse for anything of that sort."

"Oh, I am not exactly a nun," said Luigia, with a short laugh in which there was no mirth.

"Neither am I," returned Belle, with a laugh that was real; "and if one's husband doesn't mind, I don't see the harm of amusing one's self with other men just a little."

"Just a little, yes," repeated Luigia. "It is very entertaining as long as it remains just a little—I quite agree with you. But it becomes serious if it goes too far."

"You did not—*care*?" questioned Belle, arrested by a sudden and startling idea, and turning round to scrutinize her.

"Oh no, I did not care—not the least in the world."

"Luigia, do you know, you have altered again in these last few months. I was struck by the change the moment I saw you. People who live with you always would not notice it, perhaps, but——"

Luigia rose, and crossing to the hearth, looked at the reflection of her face in the oval mirror hanging over the mantelshelf. She took up a lighted candle and held it close to the glass. She held it crooked, and the melted wax ran down and dropped on to the carpet, but she did not seem to notice it.

"What change do you see?" she asked.

"You look drawn, haggard, wretched," said Belle, coming up behind her, "and there is a sort of desperate look in your eyes."

She set the candle down again and turned away.

"I have not been well," she said.

"No? What has been the matter?"

"How should I know!" she spoke fiercely on impulse,

but restrained herself, and, standing by the toilet-table, took up a pin and stabbed the big pink cushion with a number of quick, unkind little pricks. "It has rained for weeks and weeks on end, and the air has been full of the smell of dying leaves, and there has been a shroud of mist hanging round the house, cutting it off from every living soul, and if I have fallen a victim to depression, it is not to be wondered at."

Poor thing! Of course, it must be dreadfully damp and melancholy here in autumn. But now we must make things more lively, mustn't we? And you shall come back with me next week and try what a month or two of London dissipation will do for you. Mama told me to be sure and make you come."

"Oh, thank you," she exclaimed with a laugh, looking up with strangely glittering eyes, "that will be delicious! I feel exactly like dancing and flirting and wearing pretty clothes."

The maid came in here, and Belle sat down to have her shoes changed. Luigia went on stabbing the pincushion mercilessly.

"Oh, and what do you think?" Belle continued. "Whom do you think we met yesterday—mama and I? It was quite by chance. We were shopping in Regent Street, and were just getting into the carriage, when Lord Egan and I almost ran into each other. Of course we stopped and spoke, and he seemed so awfully pleased to see me. But wasn't it funny? And when one thinks how large London is, and how——"

Luigia sat down suddenly in a chair by the toilet-table, swaying as she did so.

"Voulez-vous de l'eau, madame?" said the maid, looking up into her pale face; and Belle jumped up in a fright.

She drank it greedily when it was brought her, and set the glass with a shaking hand on the toilet-table. Then she smiled at Belle's alarm.

"I am always doing this now," she said; "it means nothing, though it frightens Rollo dreadfully. Please don't

say anything to him about it, and go on with what you were saying—what was it? I shall be all right if you talk and distract my attention."

"But you must be wretchedly ill if you do this sort of thing. Let Louise get you some wine. Where are my salts? Do you feel better? Lie down on the sofa."

"No—no—no!" she cried, rising and throwing out her hands to enforce her refusal. "Only let me alone; I shall be all right in a moment. Talk to me; go on with what you were saying."

She began to pace the room rapidly from end to end, but the colour did not return to her lips or cheeks. Louise withdrew, and Belle, after some further show of solicitude, relapsed into gossip as requested.

"I told him I was coming down here to-day, and I think he said something about coming too. I hope he will; the more the merrier! I told him how fond I was of Rodney, and he said he was fond of it too."

"Happy Rodney!" murmured Luigia scornfully, wandering through the room.

"Why do you speak like that? He is very nice, I am sure."

"Oh, immensely nice. I spoke from my heart."

"No, you didn't. I know your ironical tone well. You never did like him, I remember."

"Never!"

"What shall you do, then, if you have to accept him as your brother-in-law one of these days? Stranger things than that have happened before now. And really, the way he——"

"I shall bow gracefully to my destiny and congratulate you warmly on your charming husband."

"But you won't mean it?"

"Oh, no, I shan't mean it."

"Really, you are very unreasonable. What has he done to prejudice you against him like that?"

"Done? Oh, nothing—nothing whatever!" She stopped in her rapid walk, and lifted her pale face, with a look on it such as Belle had never seen on any living face before.

Hatred and revenge flashed in her lovely eyes; her soft hands were clenched as they hung hidden in the folds of her skirt. Belle half rose from her seat.

"You hate him!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I hate him!" answered Luigia; and she laughed harshly, unnaturally. Then, as Belle gazed at her in utter consternation at the wildness of her face and words, she subdued her excitement suddenly and utterly, and said, with a complete change of manner—

"Suppose we try commonplace for a change, and go down to dinner. One cannot play long for the gallery, and having fallen into a swoon and threatened murder with my eyes, I think I have done enough, don't you?" And she led the way from the room.

On the staircase, Belle insisted upon telling her details of Lady O'Hagan's illness—whether she wished to hear them or not, she said. Because she disliked a man, was that any reason for extending the dislike to all his friends and relations? And poor Lady O'Hagan had been desperately ill, quite given up, unconscious for weeks, and now they had moved her to Algiers for the rest of the winter, and Lord Egan was off duty at last. He had only arrived in London the night before, and then to run across him at once like that!—wasn't it funny?

The evening passed gaily enough, to all appearances. Major Harburton and his two sons dropped in after dinner, and a sort of skirmishing dance was got up—a wild, romping, childish affair, in which the Barber girls and the Harburton boys enjoyed themselves intensely. The squire joined in it too, though with an effort, and flew about the room with Belle, while Luigia played for them and the Major looked on, laughing. Luigia would not dance, would not romp, would not join in the laughter, though Belle tried to take her place at the piano; she kept her eyes lowered, for they were full of tragedy; and as the gay voices clamoured about her ears, her one longing was to go out by herself, away from these people, into the darkness and the moaning wind, and lie face downwards in the snow till death came to end it all.

Once her husband came to her, with a kind look in his grave eyes.

"Dance with me, Luigia," he said; "you must be stiff and tired with playing so long."

"Oh, no!" She raised her tragic eyes for an instant, and they were filled with despair. "I can play for ever if any one wants to dance."

"Are you cold?" he said, as he touched her hand.

"Yes, I am cold," she said, "but the fire does not make me warmer."

He left her. What was he to do in the face of such uncomplaining, stony despair as he had read in her eyes and heard in her voice? He passed through the room and out to his study, in spite of Bab's detaining cries, and was not seen again till quite the end of the evening. He had had letters to write, he said.

The next day there was much to do—holly to hang, currants to sift, citron to chop, pastry to roll, and a thousand preparations to make for the coming feast. Foremost in everything were the Barber girls, in whom the wild dissipation of Rodney, after their own little brown parsonage on the bleak and solitary moor, had mounted to their heads like strong champagne. They were all over the house like wild things, peeping, prying, suggesting, running into all the rooms and out again, without an idea as to what they were about. They insisted upon showing Belle Luigia's well-stocked pantry, and Belle, deeply uninterested in pantries, was forced to go. Such piles of mince-pies, such rows of plum-puddings, such dozens of tartlets and custards and jellies and preserves! And the cook was still hard at work, and Luigia's own hands were floury as she shut the pantry door and turned its grating key on the cat's wistful contemplations.

What was Luigia thinking about all the time she made this pretty show of Christmas preparation? When she opened the pantry door to exhibit its contents with housewifely pride, was her mind entirely wrapped up in sausage-rolls and mince-pies? When she hung the mistletoe in the centre of the ceiling, was she thinking of Bab and Nan's

lovers? When she went into the village through the softly falling snow with her Christmas gifts for the poor of her husband's parish, was her whole heart and soul devoted to the work of charity? Belle, even Belle, who was not noted for acuteness of observation, looked at her with vague suspicion now and then—there was such a strange sort of desperation in her eyes sometimes.

The squire held wonderful views on the subject of Christmas. If his house was not crammed from garret to basement with guests, poor relations, old servants, and every manner of retainer and hanger-on who had the least claim upon his bounty, he was the unhappiest of men. The knowledge, on the contrary, that every nook and cranny was filled to overflowing, that the shelves in the larder groaned beneath the weight of their provisions, that the cupboard doors would scarcely shut, that the benches and settles in the kitchen were crowded with smock-frocks and bent-backed old women basking in the warmth of its roaring fire—the knowledge of these facts cheered his heart and raised his spirits to such a degree that his ruddy face was one broad, beaming smile from morning to night, and whether it blew or hailed or snowed or froze, he was just the happiest man alive.

But this year the Christmas festivities had fallen through sadly. Perhaps it was due to circumstances, or perhaps the squire did not feel in his usual spirits, but, anyway, there was little attempt made to gather the party together. Belle and the Barber girls, his great-nieces, were the only guests in the one hospitable Manor House, and many an empty chamber remained shuttered and shrouded in chilly gloom. For Luigia, however, there was plenty to do on the day before Christmas, and the calls on her time and sympathy were incessant. She was here, there, everywhere, always gentle, always willing, always kind—only her thoughts were her own, and to these no one had the key.

In the afternoon Belle and the Barber girls went down to help in finishing the decorations of the church, and she found herself alone for a few moments. It was a bleak December day, with a black frost and a still blacker sky; the pumps

were tied up in sacking; the poor who came to the kitchen door looked nipped and blue with the cold. Those who could, sat snugly at home by the fireside, and there was little visiting among the outlying country houses around. Now and then a dogcart or a carriage passed along the road, its lamps flashing through the leafless hedges, its driver muffled to the ears in fur, or a farmer rode in through the wind-swept hills from his lonely homestead; but traffic there was none, life there was none. She stood by the lattice, in the dusk, watching the lights come out one after another on the lonely hillsides, where an isolated farm or a shepherd's hut stood. Every household was gathering round its lamp and fire for tea: the day's work in the biting wind was over, the cosy hour of leisure had come, when they could sit down and dwell on the thought of to-morrow's holiday and the squire's great plum-pudding.

As Luigia stood there in the dusk, there were desperate thoughts floating in her head. What was to become of her? No word had come from Lord Egan, and she was now convinced that he had deserted her. To go on living with her husband was impossible, even if, knowing all, he was generous enough to shield her behind the stainless honour of his name; yet, to seek refuge with the man who had deserted her was equally impossible. No, there were resources far more desperate floating in her mind: in one way or another she would leave her husband's house for ever, and that soon. The church bells rang out joyfully over the frozen fields. She lifted her head and listened.

"Would it be *very* wicked to kill myself?" she wondered, "for I do not know what else I can do. There is no place for me in the world—no place at all."

There was a sound behind her, and she turned quickly. It was old Anthony, the butler, bringing in the tea. She moved forward, and came back to the fire and warmed her chilled hands. Life was going on as usual—the life that she was beginning to think of ending by violent means.

In the evening there was a Christmas Eve gathering, and more jollity. The whole house was aglow with great fires and green with holly; the party, young and old, gathered

round the hearth in the firelight; fresh faggots were heaped on, the flames went roaring up the chimney, the light of them dancing over the walls and scorching the faces of the Harburton children as they roasted chestnuts and baked apples among the white-wood ash. Elderberry wine was brewed, crackers were pulled, riddles asked, short stories told, and the children sat on the floor in the front of the ring, and the schoolboys cuffed one another in the darkness, and the wind prowled round the house, roaring like a wild beast, but could find no cranny through which to enter.

Luigia, sitting on the opposite side of the hearth to her husband, with Leila Harburton's elbows in her lap, was lost in the shadow of the projecting chimney. She looked around her with a sickening sense of despair. She could have risen up in their midst and shrieked aloud:

"You people who are so happy are walking roughshod over a living, quivering, shuddering thing that cannot defend itself—a torn and mangled bleeding soul—and you are *laughing* over its agony. There is some one among you who is ill with an awful illness called *despair*, and all that is left her to hope for is *death*."

But she did not utter this forlorn cry, and the gaiety went on flowing over and around her in a ceaseless stream. If only we were gifted with eyes to see invisible things, and ears to hear what is not uttered, in how many a happy gathering should we not alight on a hidden tragedy, and read a deathly agony beneath the gayest smiles!

A few minutes later she left the room and went upstairs to lie down on the couch in the oak parlour in the dark. She had been there an hour or more when the squire stole in on tiptoe. The fire was burning low, and scarcely illumined the room; the couch was quite in the shadow; he crossed the room to it as noiselessly as he could.

"Do you want anything?" he asked her.

"No, thank you," came a low voice from the darkness.

"Is the head better?"

"Yes."

He bent over her and laid his hand for a moment very gently on her forehead. But at his touch she broke out into

such wild and uncontrollable sobbing that he knew she had only suppressed it on his entering the room. She had probably been crying like that for an hour or more, since her agitation had reached a pitch that showed she was exhausted and unable to stop.

"My poor child!" he said, taking her hot, trembling hand in the darkness. But she shuddered away from his touch.

"Oh, go away," she sobbed, "leave me alone—alone!"

"I will not be sent away, Luigia. Your troubles must be mine too."

"Not this one—oh, not this one!"

"Why not this one? Don't I know it already? Haven't I forgiven it?"

"Not this one—not this one!" she sobbed again wildly.

He bent over her; her hair was loosened, the silk of the cushion was soaked with tears. A most terrible dread and fear fell upon him, and set him trembling like a girl. He found no voice with which to speak for some moments.

"You must not lie here crying," he said at last, huskily. "You had better go to bed. I will send Matilda up to you. Come, Luigia."

She got up, and in the darkness he took her hand and led her through the room. The cushion fell on to the floor behind her, the silken shawl trailed from her shoulders, but she did not stop to rearrange them. In the light of the landing he paused, and looked at her in silence. Her dress was crushed, her heavy black hair was loosened and streaming wildly round her. She drew each breath with a quivering sob, she was the living picture of abandoned despair.

He looked at her from head to foot, at every sign of her woe and misery, and then deliberately he dropped her hand. A moment afterwards he turned away.

She stood motionless, and looked after him with great tears glittering in her eyes and hanging in the lashes. He was going back to the parlour to sit alone in its darkness, and face as best he could this new and awful calamity that had befallen him. While his hand was yet upon the handle of the door, she made a swift movement towards him, and threw out her hands.

"Rollo, Rollo!" she cried imploringly. But the door was shut upon her, the key turned gratingly, and she knew that she was most deservedly cast out from the presence of the just and loving husband she had dishonoured.

The next day was Christmas day. The squire took Belle and his nieces to church. Luigia stayed at home alone with a bad headache. He was very silent in the walk across the fields, where the sun sparkled like diamonds in the crisp snow, and the hoar-frost hung in a heavy fringe from hedge and tree. He had discarded breeches and gaiters for a commonplace pair of pepper-and-salt trousers, as more respectful to the season, but there was neither mistletoe nor holly in his buttonhole. Nan and Bab clung each to an arm, and chattered across him gaily, while Belle strolled behind him with Mrs. Harburton and a new young man from London. But he was very silent all the way, and when he spoke it seemed to be with an effort, as though his thoughts were far from them and their chatter. At the lych gate of the churchyard he did not pause, as usual, to shake every living soul he could see by the hand, and wish them an unnaturally happy Christmas. Even his old friend, Colonel King, got no word from him, though the grip he gave his hand spoke volumes. But he turned aside the same instant, and, hat in hand, with lowered head, entered the church. In the square oak pew, wreathed in holly, where as a boy he had so often knelt before, he dropped on to his knees, and his lips moved in prayer, but the petition that broke from him was one no boy's lips could have framed. And there he remained, on his knees, till the Christmas hymn broke forth, and the white-robed choristers came in.

The church was a bower of green; wreaths of holly and evergreen twined and hung wherever a pillar or arch could hold them, the laurel's dark leaves making a rich background for the bunches of scarlet berries that peeped from them here and there. Up in the chancel there was a profusion of flowers, sent by the squire's wife as part of the customary Christmas offering to the little church.

After the service there was a block of people gathered in the porch, and a great show of handshaking and Christmas

greeting, but the squire made his way through the congratulations that showered upon him, and, taking Bab on his arm, set off for home.

"What devotion!" remarked some one, looking after him. "His wife is ill, and so he must hurry back to her without stopping a moment to speak to his old friends! Well, that's what comes of being an old man's darling!"

In reality, he and Luigia had not met since the evening before, when he had turned away from her and shut himself up alone. How much he knew or suspected she had no way of judging. She had not seen him again that night, and in the morning she had sent to excuse herself from appearing at breakfast on the plea of a headache. Perhaps her head did ache; she did not know—she did not care; anyway, there was a ten-times-worse ache in her heart, that swallowed up all smaller pains. As she lay in the darkened room, she wondered vaguely what was going to happen. For herself she did not care what became of her, an unnatural apathy held her with its deathly fingers, an apathy which now and then was broken through by fits of the acutest anguish. All possible futures seemed equally impossible to her, but whatever her fate might chance to be—if he sent her forth into the highways and hedges to die at the roadside—she would not have uttered one word of appeal in her own behalf. She knew well enough that whatever line of action her husband chose to take, it would err on the side of mercy rather on that of harshness.

She remained in her room all day, prostrate with headache, so the girls were told, and all attempts to see her were in vain. In the evening she met her husband by chance on the upper gallery. It was lighted only by a lamp at the further end, and they could not see each other's faces plainly. He would have passed her without speaking, only that she placed herself directly in his way.

"What are you going to do with me?" she said.

"Do with you?" he repeated, as though unwilling to understand her.

"Yes. What are you going to do with me?" Her voice was expressionless, her face unchanging.

"We will talk of this another time," he said hurriedly, waving her aside. But he turned back again, after going a few steps, to add, "Bab and Nan are going home the day after to-morrow. Let things go on as usual till they are gone. I wish it."

He passed on, and she went back to her room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON.

THESE few brief words Luigia took as a command—a command no living power could have forced her to break. If he had told her to burn herself with red-hot irons, or publish her secret from the housetops, she would have done it. As it was she had only to move and speak, and appear as far as possible like her ordinary self, for the next two days, that the squire's innocent little nieces should not suspect there was anything amiss. She did this to the uttermost limit of her ability, sparing herself nothing, and entering into all Bab and Nan's frivolous chatter as though she had no absorbing thoughts of her own. She held herself with an iron hand, and carried out with a martyr-like spirit the one duty that remained to her—her husband's expressed wish.

Belle was spending the day with Mrs. Harburton, the squire was ill, confined to his room with a bad cold, and Luigia sat with Bab and Nan, who were wild with excitement over the coming military ball in the evening. She was going too—she, who would more willingly have gone to her grave, but her husband's wish was law, and she believed she was carrying out his wishes by going. The table was littered with ballroom finery, hothouse flowers in the process of being wired, fans, shoes, and streaming ribbons, over which Bab and Nan were hovering rapturously. Luigia, watching them, sat wearily in the great carved

chair, with her head resting against its stiff back, her hands hanging listlessly from its arms. Her face was very white and fragile-looking. Every now and then she closed her eyes involuntarily. The wave of death seemed passing over her.

"Poor dear!" said Bab, stooping over her and kissing her affectionately. "What a shame of that horrid headache not to go away! I do hope it will be better by the evening, for if you don't go I declare *I* won't. I should hate having Mrs. Harburton instead of you!"

"Oh, when once you get there," cried Nan, "you will be all right. The lights and the music are so exciting, and when they come crowding up with their swords and spurs and delightful red-coats, you will forget there are such things as headaches in the world."

Luigia turned aside her head, utterly sick at heart.

In the evening her maid dressed her for the ball. She went through the operation passively, offering no suggestions, and although she sat before the mirror, her eyes never once caught her reflection in its glass. Bab and Nan were in and out of the room the whole time, sprinkling themselves with her scent, ransacking her drawers for the twentieth time. Luigia was so generous, Luigia was so kind! It was her pearl necklace, and long white gloves that Bab wore, and her gold embroidered slippers that peeped from beneath Nan's muslin skirt. Would she tie their ribbons, would she arrange their flowers? No one could do it so well as she could—there was no one so sweet and kind as their darling Luigia in all the world.

When dressed she went to her husband's room.

The squire's dressing-room was large and airy. A pleasant smell of wood-fire pervaded the air, and in a comfortable armchair on the hearth reposed the invalid in a wonderful Turkish dressing-gown and easy slippers. A lamp burned on the table at his side, and there was a newspaper on his knee. At his feet his favourite dog lay stretched asleep.

He turned as she entered and looked round at her. She came slowly through the room to his side, a vision of graceful womanhood in pearly silk and deep lace, with knots of

damp, fresh violets on her shoulders and at her breast. There were more too in her hair, and the air was full of their sweet woodland scent as she moved toward him. Never again could he endure the sight or the scent of a violet! The perfume, innocent and delicious as it is, seemed to him loaded with all that is evil and deadly; it blanched his cheek, and turned his pulses cold with memories best forgotten—of a face cruel in its sweetness, of soft fingers that had stabbed him, of something he had cherished that had turned and mocked him and his grey hairs. She came and stood beside him.

"You are going to the ball?" he inquired, and his tone was one of surprise.

"Yes," she said. "I thought you wished it."

"I never said so."

"No. Not in so many words."

She moved a step nearer to him. She was very calm, but it was the calmness of despair.

"Can I stay at home then?" she said.

He looked at her steadily. She was standing near him, very white and still, and the perfume of her violets was strong in the air.

"Don't you want to go?" he said.

"Bab and Nan do," she answered. "I would rather go to my grave."

Into the keen scrutiny of his eyes there came a wistfulness, and the wistfulness gleamed with something like tears. Twice he tried to speak, but his voice failed him. He put out his hand as though to ward her off.

"Violets!" he ejaculated. "Violets again! I have thought of it so often—that day on the staircase. Are you really that same little girl——?"

He turned aside his head, and the broken sentence was more eloquent in the pity of it than any long speech could have been.

She stood mute.

"What am I to do?" she said at last.

"God forbid that I should lay my commands upon you *now*," he answered, "but *I*—I *could* not go——"

He sank back in his chair again, with his face turned away from her, and she left the room silently—left him for ever!

In the hall below the Barber girls were waiting for her in a flutter of excitement. She went slowly down the staircase towards them with eyes in which there was no life. There was no life in her face either; it was deadly white, and there was a stillness about it that was strangely out of place with her ballroom finery.

"I need not go," she said. Then, struck by their astonished looks, she added, "I mean, that I am not well—I must stay at home." She put out her hand to the banister for support.

There was something so strange about her manner that the girls shrank away from her involuntarily. Then, ashamed, Bab came forward.

"You are ill," she said.

"Yes, I am ill," she replied, and she passed on into the dining-room and sat down before her escritoire.

The girls hung about her with affectionate inquiries while she wrote a note to Mrs. Harburton, explaining her absence and transferring the chaperonage. She would not hear of either of them remaining with her, not for one moment, and in another ten minutes they were packed into the carriage and had driven off to call for Belle and the Harburtons on the way.

Luigia went back to her room, and, dismissing her maid, hung cowering over the fire. Yet she was not cold, she was burning hot; there were hectic spots coming out on her cheeks, her calmness had fled. She left the fireside and paced the room from end to end, avoiding the reflection of herself in the glass, since she was afraid of her own desperate face. There were again desperate thoughts floating in her mind, and they were taking definite shape. She looked from the window, it was clear, bright moonlight; the air was still and frosty, every leaf and twig in the garden stood out in bold relief. In a moment her resolution was taken. She slipped on her gipsy cloak, drew its quilted hood over her head, stole down a back staircase, and

let herself out through a garden door into the night air. With a fearful backward glance at the shrouded house, she ran lightly down a dark path leading through the shrubberies.

Here she seemed to breathe more freely; the keen night air struck chill on her flushed face, the fever in her pulses lessened. It was a mad thing to do, for her arms and neck were bare, and her feet shod only in frail white ballroom slippers. They were chilled through before she had gone six yards from the house, but what did she care? If she caught a cold and died so much the better! To die was her one thought, her one longing—to lie down in some lonely place in a wood under the naked trees and let the wind and the rain and the cold kill her. Oh, what a merciful relief to be out of it all!—done with!—at rest in the grave, where no reproachful eyes could look at her through blinding tears! "Oh God of mercy, let me die—open some way—let me die!" she cried again and again as she hurried through the moonlit paths.

She went through the garden and through the little wicket-gate into the wood beyond. Here a great and wonderful stillness reigned, not a leaf, not a twig stirred, the zig-zag path leading through it was bright with moonlight, the trees and bushes on either side were thrown in blackest shadow. She followed the narrow track, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Every now and then the face of the moon was hidden, the straggling bushes caught her cloak as she passed, the thorny arms of the brambles tore her dress in the darkness. Again it broke out, cold and brilliant. In the clear spaces where the trees had been felled, every leaf, every tassel on the nut boughs was touched with magic light. It was a fairyland of beauty, but she passed straight through it with wild, unseeing eyes.

Far through the wood there was a pool lying among the bushes at the side. She knew the pool well, and it was for this pool she was making. She had seen it last in summer, cool, quiet, profoundly still, shadowed in green, leafy gloom. She wanted to see it again—now—to-night. She wanted to look down on to its quiet, rayless water, to hide

herself in the bushes, and then to—what? She would not put the thought into words. When she got to the pool she would see——

She reached the place at last, and, pushing her way through the snapping branches of the frozen trees, sat down beside it. One ray of misty moonlight shot through the thickly growing branches and touched the surface of the pool. It was covered with ice. There was snow under the bushes, and the ground was crisp with it. She sat on the margin of the pool with her face in her hands, looking down on the spot where the light fell. All around was inky darkness, there was no sound anywhere. She was cold now, but she scarcely knew it; there was fever in her veins.

She did not wait there long. It was not the pool of her fancy—it was covered with hard ice! She went back to the path, and on again towards the end of the wood. She did not know where to go—what to do. She could never return to the house she had left and the broken-hearted old man whose eyes were filled with tears. If only there was some way of dying! But she could not find it—that, too, seemed shut against her.

She was getting near the end of the wood, when a sound struck her ear. In the silence she heard a footstep—it was coming nearer. She paused in the middle of the path, listening. The space around her was clear and open, a little farther on came a sharp bend. Round this bend, the wayfarer must come. Let the wayfarer, whoever he is, beware of the mad woman in the lonely path! Her white silk gown gleamed in the opening of her cloak as she caught it back, on her bare arm there were jewels flashing. It was a strange, unnatural figure to come across in the solitude of a little wood near midnight. Let the stranger beware! If the beautiful lady is mad she may do him some mortal injury!

He came on unconsciously, and turned the bend in the path. He was no woodman returning late to his cottage in the lane, but a young man in evening dress, which the light overcoat he wore did not entirely conceal. He too, like Luigia, seemed not to feel the keenness of the air, for it was

recklessly flung open; he was smoking a cigar. He stopped short on coming face to face with this strange, unexpected figure, and for a moment it seemed to him he had come across an apparition from another world.

But if he did not know her, she knew him! She flung up her head suddenly, and stood looking at him with eyes which flashed dangerously. He stood before her—the man who was her ruin! He once had been all the world to her; he was still her heaven and her hell. By some strange chance fate had flung him across her path. They were alone under the night sky.

He came a step nearer.

"*You!*" he cried, in the utmost astonishment, flinging away his cigar.

"Keep back," she cried, waving him aside with a movement of grand scorn, such as an injured queen might use in dealing with a subject who had offended her beyond all hope of pardon. "Do not attempt to touch me!"

"Is it *you?*" he exclaimed, again approaching.

"It is I."

"What are you doing here?"

"Does that concern you?"

"Very much. I heard you were ill. I was coming——"

"I am not ill—you can allay your fears." She laughed contemptuously.

"They said——"

"I have no wish to hear what they said. You can save yourself the fatigue of repetition."

"Luigia!" he exclaimed, "what is the matter with you? Why are you out here—and alone, and in this dress?"

He placed himself immediately in front of her, looking into her face with an anxiety that was dominated by overwhelming astonishment.

"Why, indeed! I am not mad as you think—or, if I am, it is with misery. I came out here to hide away and die, if possible. There is nothing else left me."

He tried to take her hand, but she flung him off.

"Don't touch me, I say! What are we to each other now? Less than nothing! If I ever loved you—and I sup-

pose I did—now I hate you. Yes—now I hate you—scorn you—loathe you!"

"What have I done?" he cried.

She swept away from him without replying, and went forward through the moonlit space between the felled trees. He followed.

"What has changed you like this? What have I done? I *will* know. I could not write; I have only been in England three days. I went to the ball to-night on the chance of seeing you there. I heard you were ill. I left at once, drove as far as the cross-roads, and then came on foot the near way. I meant——"

"Oh, don't explain," she interrupted, "explanations can make no difference now. I am past them utterly—past everything but blank misery. It doesn't matter what you did or meant to do; nothing matters now, nothing at all."

"What do you mean by all this? You did not—you *could* not think I had forgotten you?"

"Deserted me, you mean! That is the true way to put it. There is no reason why you should not desert me, is there?"

"I never dreamed of deserting you."

"No? Then I have misjudged you! A thousand apologies! I thought that *now*, perhaps, you had thought better of your little infatuation. Men do repent of these things sometimes." She laughed harshly.

She was coming back through the clearing towards him again. He caught hold of her and held her firmly by the wrists, and forced her to face him.

"You are *mad!*" he said.

"Yes, *mad!*" she echoed, looking up at him with the same wild, reckless laugh, "that is it!—first mad with love, and now mad with misery. Shut me up in an asylum and have done with me."

She broke from him, and turned back to pace the patch of moonlight as before. Her movements were rapid, excited, graceful. She flung out her hands every now and then to enforce her words when speaking. He thrust his

deep into the pockets of his overcoat, and stood watching her with drawn brows.

"Did you ever give a thought to me all these weeks and weeks?" she went on. "Did you think it likely I could go on living with my husband as before? Did you *care* what became of me? If I had followed my desire I should have killed myself long ago—flung myself into that pond—taken poison. Did you take any steps to prevent this? Did you care what became of me in my misery?"

"You knew it was only a question of a few weeks, that I was coming back as soon as I could. Besides, I was ill myself with the same fever."

"You say so, but do you think I believe it? Men say many things, but women do not always believe them. Why should you come back to me? Why?"

"You know I love you."

"What, even now? Oh, no," laughing mirthlessly, "that would be too much to expect! I do *not* expect it—not for one moment."

He began to explain how he had been kept, that he had been ill himself, why he had not written, how much he had thought of her; but she would scarcely listen. She roamed backwards and forwards, laughing ironically every now and then when he made his protestations of faithfulness.

"Words, only words!" she exclaimed, waving him away. "I prefer actions. If you had taken one single step to secure me against the agony of suspense, the chance of suicide, I would believe you. As it is, your words—many as there are of them—have little effect."

"I begin to think you really are mad! You are most unreasonable, you will not even listen. What more can I do than tell you how things were? I love you still, always have loved you, always shall, but you will not believe me."

"As though that mattered to me now!" she cried. "Love—love, what is it? A passing madness that leaves behind it—*ruin!*"

"Love is no crime," he said doggedly.

"You can say that? Then you do not know it and its torment. To me it is hell itself."

"Luigia," he said gently, holding out his hands to her, "don't talk like this. Come to me—come back to me again. I have come for you."

"Oh, but you don't want me still," she cried despairingly.

"I do—still—more than anything on earth."

But she avoided his touch, and flinging up her arms with sudden wildness in the moonlight, cried out—

"Oh! miserable creature that I am! I have no God, no honour left. I am lost!—lost!—and there is only hell before me!"

He caught her in his arms.

"If you are lost, then I am lost too," he said. "We have had our heaven—we will go through hell together."

She hesitated, then turned, and with an abandoned, stifled cry that was half love and half despair, flung herself, weeping passionately, on to his breast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WOUNDED ANIMAL.

"May God have mercy on this dishonoured house!"

So said old Anthony, the butler, as he went about his duties, shamefaced and saddened. He could not look any one in the face, he would not go to church, he avoided the village, he felt for his deserted master as though the calamity had been his own.

The event that had thrown Rodney into a state of convulsion was four days old, and the gossip and excitement was at its height. Over every tea-table it was discussed; the fiercest winds, the most nipping frosts could not keep people at home, they were willing to brave any tempest to meet and go over it again. The gossips of the place rushed round from house to house, gathering information, comparing notes, casting up their eyes in horror, and adding their

testimony to the suspicious circumstances that had been observed by every one for many months past. For them the short winter afternoons passed only too quickly.

The squire alone was exempt from this general visitation. There was no gossiping for him! He had scarcely opened his lips since the fatal hour of the desertion; even the servants fought shy of him, looked at him askance, and shrank away when they met him in the hall or on the stairs. People shunned him, left him alone like a wounded animal in its hole. Belle, horrified and scandalized to the last degree, had returned home; the Barber girls, mystified and frightened, had gone back to their parsonage to talk over the strange event in whispers. He was left to face the horrible calamity that had befallen him as best he could.

He met it by neither eating nor speaking, and for the first four days he never left the house. He wandered through it like a forlorn spirit, not knowing what to do. Again and again he went to Luigia's room, the key of which he kept himself, and there he sat in the cold, looking round him. No one had touched it since she left, no maid had dared lay a finger on any of her possessions. There hung the pearly silk gown on its peg in the cupboard—the ghost of her beautiful self—and there on the toilet-table a litter of bracelets and rings and pretty trifles, just as she had left them. He looked at them one after another, touched them, and laid them back again in their old places. There was nothing to be done, they would never be used again, they were abandoned for ever.

The room was dusky, cold, oppressive with omens and shadows. He went to the window and pulled up its blind. The red sun was sinking behind the leafless, frozen wood like a ball of fire, the wintry sky was aflame with an angry, lurid light, the valley was filling with the chill, raw mist of evening. The world looked cold and hard and frozen, and turning away, he left the room and went downstairs to sit alone in the gloom.

Old Anthony came timidly to the door.

"Shall I bring the lamps and tea, sir?"

"No!" said the squire.

What man ever drinks tea alone? Who wants to read when the eyes are too full of trouble to see a word of the printed page? He sat by the table doing nothing, and the gloomy dusk deepened into darkness.

There was a firm step in the hall, a strong hand upon the handle of the door, and Colonel King entered, unannounced. The squire did not rise; he only looked up and held out his hand silently. In times of great affliction the obligations of society are sometimes forgotten. Colonel King grasped the hand warmly, and drew forward a chair.

"Come nearer the fire, Tom," he said, laying his hand on the squire's shoulder.

"Yes," said the squire, rising obediently and taking the chair indicated, "it is bitterly cold."

Colonel King drew up another chair to the centre of the hearth, and sat down near him. He took out his pipe and began to fill it.

"Have a smoke," he said; "where's your pipe?"

"I don't know."

"In your pocket, perhaps," rummaging as he spoke, and giving it a shake. "No? On the mantelpiece, then?"

He rose, found it, filled it with tobacco, and laid it on the squire's knee.

The squire looked at it, then put it aside.

"I have tried it," he said, "and there's no flavour in it."

"Come," said Colonel King, stretching out his hand and laying it on that of his old friend, "you mustn't sit here moping in the dark. It's not good for a man. Have a stiff glass of toddy—that's what you want. I'll get it. I know where everything is."

He crossed the room, got out a cut-glass bottle of whisky, water, and glasses. The squire made no objection, and when it was mixed, he drank it to satisfy his friend.

"You mustn't mope, you know," went on the colonel, as he sat down again; "you must eat your meals whether you want them or not. It's a duty. There isn't the slightest advantage in getting ill that I can see."

"No, no," said the squire, "I don't mean to mope. But you must give me time—a little time."

"I'd rather see you in a towering passion. I'd do a good deal to put you in one. It would be an excellent thing—a most healthy sign."

"You are very good," said the squire, rousing himself with an effort; "no one else will come near me. Even the servants look at me as though they had never seen me before. They won't speak, and they get away as fast as they can."

"Fools!" ejaculated the colonel, puffing at his pipe—"blundering fools! They mean well, but they don't know how to show it."

"They need not shun me. I've been a good master——"

"My dear Tom, they'd be cut up into little bits, any one of 'em, if they thought you'd like it, only they go the wrong way about."

The squire shook his head. "No," he said huskily, "there's no one left—no one at all."

The colonel poked up the fire.

"Don't take it so terribly to heart, dear boy," he said; "she isn't worth it, you know."

Silence.

"Come, talk about it; tell me your plans. What are you going to do? Sue for a divorce?"

"No."

"No? Why not?"

"I don't think it would mend matters."

"It would put them on a better footing with the world."

"I don't think any marriage now would make much difference as far as the world is concerned, and in the sight of God none at all. There is a verse in the Bible somewhere—I can't think of it at this moment—that says a divorced woman can never be another man's wife."

"Good heavens, man! you wouldn't take her back?"

"As my wife, no—no honest man could do that, I suppose; but I will not give up my claim on her." He raised his hand with sudden energy, and brought it down on the

table with a force that made the glasses ring. "No! I took her for better for worse; and because it turns out worse, I won't break my vow."

"She has broken hers, and all the laws of marriage."

"But *I* have not broken *mine*, and I am still her husband. If ever her lover throws her over, I shall have first claim—to befriend her, reclaim her."

There was silence a few minutes between them, Colonel King staring into the fire, the squire sitting sideways at the table, looking across the darkness of the room.

"No," he said presently, "divorce is to me only a name; it means nothing. Morally—to her own satisfaction—she can never be his wife while I live, whatever ceremony they go through. They have done this thing deliberately, with their eyes open, and they must go through with it. I shall not move in the matter."

"There—there may be children," said the colonel, presently, poking the fire violently.

The squire looked up sharply, rose, walked to the window, and stood there looking out with his back to the room. There was a long pause. Colonel King hammered and beat the burning log as though it had done him a personal injury.

Presently the squire came back and sat down again.

"Yes," he said quietly, "there may be children—I ought to have thought of that. Perhaps it would be better—more generous to—to claim a divorce."

"If it were me," cried the colonel, "I'd cast her off, bag and baggage, and be glad of the riddance. I should boil with indignation; I should——"

"No," interrupted the squire, "no, you would not." Then after a pause he added deliberately, "Mine was the original sin in marrying her."

"Oh, come, my dear fellow——"

"It was," he repeated with decision. "I was sixty and she was eighteen. What right had I to take her young life and bind it with mine? She was an absolute child; she knew nothing; it was my duty, if I loved her, to think for her and act for her and hold back. I should have left her

for some younger man, but I was selfish and took her myself. Now I am justly punished!"

"My dear old Tom, he isn't worth a single hair of your head!"

"As to worth, I cannot enter into the question of that. He is young—there lies the root of the matter. So is she—only one and twenty last May, Will. Think what that means—a mere child, a mere child still."

Colonel King rose and paced the floor with a brow of thunder. All the pent-up disgust and indignation within him needed an outlet. He spoke at last as impulse prompted him.

"It's the most treacherous, cold-blooded piece of wickedness I've ever come across," he broke out. "If you had been a bad man, an unkind husband, there might have been some faint excuse. As it is, there is none, not a shadow! If ever that thieving, lying scoundrel dares to cross my path, I shall kick him out of it as I would some loathsome reptile I wouldn't stoop to touch."

The squire was silent.

"I know it's the fashion to rave and rant about love," he went on. "It's considered very fine to tear your hair and say you would like to go to hell for somebody's sake. It pleases the gallery and the pit immensely; they like to see a passion torn to rags. But for myself, I've no sympathy with it. It's pure, brutish, sensual selfishness, that's what it is; it's not love at all. Love! Good heavens! how can one dare to call it by such a name?"

The squire was still silent.

"I put it to you," continued the colonel, still pacing the room in hottest indignation, "could a man who hated a woman with the deadliest hatred do her a worse injury than is done under the name of love? Could he more utterly ruin her for this world and the next?"

"Young men don't look at things as we do," said the squire.

"Oh, don't irritate me by making excuses. This vile thing that people rave about and call romantic names stands before me in its nakedness, without a shred of cov-

ering, without one rag of tinsel to make it pretty. I see it as it is, and I abhor it. A true man would go to the other end of the earth before he would injure what we all agree must be chivalrously protected, honoured, served."

"Yes," said the squire, slowly, "but I suppose the temptation is very strong."

"Oh, let the wild beasts wallow in the mire if they like. But a man! What is one's idea of a man? Do you remember what we put before us in our boyhood, Tom?—something that should above all things be *strong*—strong for the right, unflinching in duty, gentle to women, chivalrous to all things that could be harmed. Well, I don't think we could better that idea much, even now."

"Perhaps not," assented the squire, adding wearily, "Don't imagine I judge the matter lightly. To me a woman is sacred, and I'd rather go out and hang myself twice over than induce her to go one inch in the wrong direction for my sake."

Colonel King flung himself back in his chair on the hearth, the squire sat still in the shadows. Candles were brought and set upon the table by old Anthony, who swept his master's downcast face with an anxious glance as he left the room.

"I wish they wouldn't stare at me so!" exclaimed the squire, irritably. "They all do it! What's the reason? Do they want to see how a man looks when his wife tells the world she finds him too dull to live with?"

It was the first touch of bitterness to which he had given way. He thrust his hands into the pockets of his coat on either side, and raised his head defiantly. But even as he did so, his expression changed; he paused, sat bolt upright, and drew forth from the right-hand pocket of his shooting-coat an object that, meeting his hand there, had thrilled him with a flood of memories. He laid the object on the table and looked at it silently. It was a little lace-edged handkerchief, still faintly scented, and embroidered with the letter "L" in one corner. How came it in his pocket? His mind went back to some weeks ago, when, coming home from a drive through a snowstorm, Luigia had met

him in the hall, and, with a little hesitation at first, had helped him off with his great-coat and brushed the snow off his face with her little handkerchief. She had done it silently, timidly, and hurried away the next moment, leaving it tucked in his pocket; but, oh! how his heart had beat high with joy at the hope that all might yet be coming right between them! Now all hope was fled for ever. There was no possibility of things righting themselves, the pretty, gentle thing he loved so well had fled from him, never to return. It was all over—the fairy romance, the sweet delusion—and he was alone once more, despised, deserted. For the moment, with the touch of that square of fine cambric, with the faint trace of perfume it bore, the old glamour of her actual presence came over him, and a sense of all he had lost throbbed through his heart with a wild pain. He took up the little handkerchief, then laid it down again. A mist swam before his eyes, gathered thickly into tears, and he covered his face with his hands.

"Damn her!" ejaculated Colonel King, suddenly to himself, below his breath.

"Take care," said the squire, raising his head with eyes that flashed through his tears. "Remember to whom you are speaking!"

Colonel King turned round in his chair, and his eyes flashed with a dangerous light.

"It's the first time I've ever cursed a woman, and I hope it'll be the last, but, good God! she deserves it, and I say it again, damn her!" He spoke through his clenched teeth, and his queer, wistful face had on it a look that was fierce with a thirst for revenge.

"King," said the squire, rising, "I cannot stand by and listen to that sort of thing—even from you. If you say another word, by Jove! I—I shall knock you down!"

The colonel rose too, and the men faced each other. The firelight flickered over both their faces—on the squire's, indignant and resolute; on the colonel's, towering half a head above him. Something in this difference of stature and in the attitude they bore each other, struck a chord in the colonel's mind that vibrated with old memories. His

present surroundings were transformed into a scene in the past: he saw again the shady river-side meadows at Eton, a little fellow with fair, curly hair and an angry face pluckily offering to fight him who was then, as now, a good half-head the taller of the two; again the soft summer wind—the wind of youth, which bears in its breezes an air straight from heaven—was fanning their flushed cheeks; again he heard the ripple of the swiftly flowing water and the voices of the others at cricket in the fields behind. It all came back in a rush, then faded—faded, leaving the reality; the boy with the flushed face and curly hair was now the squire, still vindictive, still plucky, still ready to fight him against long odds. His shaggy face filled with the tenderness of reminiscence.

"You've threatened me with that once before, and only once," he said. "Do you remember—the day we found a dead mole on the river bank at Eton? We each claimed it. You said you saw it first, I said I did, and then you said you'd knock me down if I told such lies. You were nine and I was eleven, and it was hundreds and hundreds of years ago."

There was a short pause, during which the squire's face worked with emotion. Then he held out his hand.

"I remember," he said huskily; "we shared it in the end—didn't we?—and I made its skin into a bag to keep our marbles in. I remember. Forgive me for what I said just now. I have the instinct to defend her, you know. She—she is my wife."

CHAPTER XXX.

SOCIAL SUICIDE.

In May of that year Jean Ingram had occasion to be in Paris, and one evening, having nothing better to do, he sauntered into the Opera House. There he met a man he knew, and they went together into the stalls. They were

early, and the house was still filling. Ingram, who never wasted his energies, leaned back with folded arms contemplating the empty air; his friend Gracechurch, glass in eye, swept the house in search of pretty faces.

"There's a handsome woman for you!" he ejaculated to Ingram. "American, I should say. See? Just coming in. Splendid creature, isn't she?"

"I don't doubt it," murmured Ingram; "only I haven't found her."

"There—to your left. You're looking at the wrong box. Not there. Who's that, though? Why it's Egan, isn't it? By Jove! it *is*. And that's the woman, I suppose."

His scrutiny had passed from the "splendid creature" to one of the boxes near, into which a party was just entering. The people in front of them, who were English, were looking in the same direction, and Ingram looked with the rest.

"Heard the story, of course?" said Gracechurch, in an undertone—"married woman, ran away with him. Case coming off in the courts next month."

"Indeed!" observed Ingram, who was now studying his programme attentively.

Gracechurch raised his opera-glass. "Don't see what he did it for myself. She's not worth looking at. Who was she, d'you know?"

"Perfectly. Among other distinctions she happens to be one of my most intimate friends."

"You don't say so! I say, introduce me, will you?"

"If the opportunity ever occurs," answered Ingram, lifting his eyes and fixing them with an absolutely expressionless gaze on the stage curtain. "But I don't think it will."

There was something in his manner that forbade further pursuit of the subject, and Gracechurch was obliged to content himself with staring through his opera glass at the woman who "wasn't worth looking at."

Luigia came forward slowly to the front of the box, conscious that many eyes were upon her, and disdainful of their scrutiny. It would have been hard to recognize the "wood-nymph," as Ingram had once called her, in the

brilliance and splendour of the *toilette* in which she now appeared. She was enveloped from head to foot in a blood-red velvet cloak, lined throughout with white silk, and when she flung this back she was still in flaming, gleaming silk, with embroideries of silver, and diamond butterflies trembling on her shoulders and in her hair. There was a dazzling blaze, a flashing, quivering splendour about her as she moved, and when she sat down and leaned forward towards the stage, the English people in front of Ingram whispered together, and the matron of the party pursed up her lips and turned the other way.

There were two gentlemen with her besides Lord Egan, but no lady. One of these, a dissipated-looking young man, with a fair, drooping moustache and stooping shoulders, sat down beside her with a devoted air; the others took chairs behind.

"That's De Morne—old Lord Bracebrain's son, you know—talking to her," whispered Gracechurch. "Going a devil of a pace. Run through three fortunes already. Knocking himself all to pieces."

"Indeed!" said Ingram, again with absolute indifference. He was evidently not in a genial mood; Gracechurch did not recollect having found him so stiff and dull on former occasions.

The piece was a tragedy—beautiful, improbable, passionate. The music carried one away with it, and when it rose in a burst of appeal, when every one on the stage was swayed by a great, an overwhelming emotion, Ingram seized his opportunity and looked across the sea of faces at Luigia. She was leaning a little forward, her head resting on her hand, her eyes full of intensity, her fan idle. She was too deeply absorbed in the play to feel his scrutiny, and he observed her undetected. She had changed somewhat; her eyes had grown deeper, the outline of her cheek less rounded; she was not so pretty as she had been. Was she happy? In these five months had the mad infatuation died a natural death, or did she still consider Lord Egan's society sufficient compensation for all she had so recklessly flung to the winds?

As the curtain fell for the last time he turned to Gracechurch.

"Don't wait for me," he said, "I'm going to speak to some friends." And with a nod he made his way out.

He joined the crush on the grand staircase, and, by dint of successful manœuvring, reached the foot just in front of Lord Egan's party. There he moved aside to let Luigia pass, and as he did so their eyes met. Into hers flashed an instantaneous recognition, and for a moment she stood irresolute on the bottom step; then, with head erect and unseeing eyes, she moved on and passed him. Ingram, nothing daunted, waylaid her companion De Morne, who was at her side.

"Thought I recognized you," he said. Then, as De Morne stared at him with a perfectly unrecognizing expression, "We met at the Carlton Club last year, you remember. My name's Ingram."

"Ah, to be sure," returned the other offering him two fingers. "Yes, of course. How are you?"

Ingram had no more interest in De Morne than De Morne had in him, but he had done what he intended to do —stopped the party. In another minute he was shaking hands with Lord Egan, and he afterwards accompanied him and his friend to the outer steps of the Opera House, where Luigia and De Morne were waiting for them.

Here all was noise and confusion—a trampling of horses, a shouting of voices, a crush of people. A long line of carriages lined the roadway, and in the delay before their own came up, Ingram went forward and spoke to Luigia.

"Am I become so old and weather-beaten," he said, "as to be altogether past recognition?"

She pushed back the lace wrapping from her forehead and looked him fully in the face.

"I don't think you have changed," she said deliberately.

"No? Then you cut me intentionally just now?"

She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, and made a movement as though she would pass him. Ingram barred the way.

"I'm leaving Paris on Friday," he said.

"Yes?"

"Is it possible to see you before I go?"

"Just possible," she replied coolly, "but scarcely probable, I should say."

"May I call?"

"If you do you will probably find me out. Neither do I think you know where to find me, which is, perhaps, a still more conclusive argument."

"Luigia," said Ingram suddenly, in a different tone, "why did you cut me just now? Why mayn't I call? Is there any reason on earth why we shouldn't still be friends?"

"I have no friends," she answered very proudly.

"I refuse to be cut—I refuse to be sent away," he said. "Tell me where you are living."

"Why are you so persistent?"

"Because—now and then, when I chance to care about anything, I'm not easily put off. And I care about seeing you."

"I must go," she said with a little sign to him to move. "I can't keep the carriage waiting in all this crush," and he was forced to make way. She passed him; then, with a woman's inconsistency, looked back at him over her shoulder with something of her old smile.

"Come if you like," she said. "We are living in the Avenue Marceau, numero —. But you won't find me in."

"I shall chance it," said Ingram.

He waited till the carriage had disappeared among the crowd of other vehicles, and then he walked back in the moonlight to his hotel.

The next day he called at the address she had given him, and was told that madame would see him. As he followed the servant, hat in hand, through the vestibule he began to wonder why on earth he had come. He was not as a rule given to nervousness, but at that moment he found himself distinctly nervous. What should he talk about? Suppose there should be long pauses! Why in the world had he come? But, in spite of inward trepidation, he made his *entrée* in a manner as nonchalant as usual.

At first he was only conscious of a blaze of sunshine streaming through great open windows, and of some one coming forward to meet him, with a rustle of silk petticoats and a jangling of châtelaine-chains. Then he found Luigia's soft hand in his, and heard her voice saying, "I repented my refusal, and waited at home on the chance of your coming, though I scarcely expected you."

He need not have dreaded awkward pauses. She was absolutely self-possessed—a little too much so, perhaps—and talked lightly and easily about everything she had been doing. Oh yes, they had been very gay—going everywhere, to all the races, all the theatres, all the operas; next week they were off to Monte Carlo, after that they were going on to the Italian lakes. Wasn't the weather lovely? Not too hot and not too cold—just perfection. Everything was perfection in fact, and it seemed from what he gathered that her life was one constant rush of gaiety and excitement. He looked and listened, but he was not easily deceived. In spite of all her gaiety he did not think she looked happy; the outline of her cheek was slightly hollowed; in her speech, now and then, there lurked a note of bitterness, and her eyes had a tragic look in them when she forgot to smile.

She was beautifully dressed in a pale heliotrope gown, embroidered with purple flowers, and her hair was elaborately arranged and kept in place with gold bands; the châtelaine hanging from her waist was jewelled, and her rings were all new and costly. But she—how did *she* look? She had altered; every vestige of girlishness had disappeared; she had a worn, tired air.

Presently she asked him after her father.

"I have heard nothing of him lately," she said, quite as a matter of course.

Daubigny was in Norway fishing, he told her. Lady Adelaide was at home, embroidering a new altar cloth and dosing the village with a patent medicine of her own invention. Belle was married as no doubt she knew.

"Yes, I saw it in the papers," she said; "but, of course, they don't tell you anything. What is Lord Penywern like?"

"I hesitate to speak," said Ingram, "since, being a rival, I no doubt observe him with a prejudiced eye."

"Oh, you never took Belle's admirers deeply to heart. I'm not afraid of the prejudice. Please describe him."

"Alas!" sighed Jean, "he has so much that has been denied to me! Youth—that gift of the gods!—is his. He will be twenty-one next month."

"And Belle is twenty-five!"

"His complexion," continued Ingram, "is interesting, perhaps, because it is so varied. The surface is undulating, and there are one or two localities that might even be termed mountainous. He wears an eye-glass."

"He doesn't sound nice. But go on!"

"Oh, he is. He has an endearing lisp, and his lower jaw drops in a very amiable manner. He has also a command of stable language that is fascinating. He dresses just a shade too like his groom perhaps—but Belle is exerting herself."

"Poor Belle! Then she's made a poor match?"

"Oh, not at all. Quite the contrary. He has—and here again the poisoned fang of jealousy attacks me!—more money than he knows what to do with through his American mother."

"She can't possibly be happy?"

"If one may judge by 'nods and becks and wreathed smiles,' I should say she was in quite an idyllic state of bliss. I saw her last on Pen's drag at Sandown surrounded by his admiring friends. They were making themselves funny with wooden dolls in their hats and with the drawing of corks in each other's faces."

"I cannot accept the wooden dolls," said Luigia with a faint smile. "I think you are embroidering the tale."

"Oh, well," replied Ingram, "that was my impression. But, as I warned you beforehand, the eye of prejudice does not see clearly."

"Poor Belle!" she said again, and she sighed. Then, after a pause, "And you? What has been happening to you?"

"Oh, nothing," he said, rising to go, "and nothing ever

will. *I* was done with years ago—dead and buried—and the interesting apparition you see before you at this moment is only a ghost. The ghost must go, I am afraid—I have kept you long enough!"

She rose too, and gave him her hand. She did not attempt to detain him.

"Good-bye," she said. Then lifting her eyes and speaking deliberately—"And if you come across any of my friends in England you can tell them that I am perfectly well and perfectly happy."

"I can say so, certainly."

"And it is true."

"I don't doubt it."

But even as he uttered the words there was something in his expression that told her he spoke apart from the truth. Her face changed, and she dragged away her hand.

"Anyway, say it please," she said.

"I will say anything you like," he said gently.

She had half turned away, but turned back again. The old instinct to confide in him and utter her thoughts to him was clamouring to break down the barrier they had each been careful to erect.

"Is it very wicked, do you think?" she said suddenly, and a burning blush rose to her face.

"Social suicide? No, I don't think it's wicked at all," he answered calmly.

"I wish *I* didn't."

"Why should you? After all, it's only a social law you have broken, it has no root in nature. In some countries——"

"Oh, I don't know about that, and it doesn't matter," she interrupted, "for if all the world said I was right I should still say I was wrong. There is an inner light one goes by that is stronger than the voice of other people. I didn't go away with him for one single high and noble reason. I went simply and solely because I wanted to—*badly*. There lies the root of the matter. Try as I will I can't argue myself into the belief that I've done a great and noble deed."

"You've a right to live in the teeth of the world if you like."

"Oh, I could do it if my conscience acquitted me, but it doesn't. If he had been ill—blind—paralysed—deserted, I should have felt justified in going to him—something higher than my own pleasure would have stepped in and given me the right. But there was no such saving clause."

"Why is your own pleasure to count for nothing?"

"Ought one to snatch at it at the expense of others? Am I not a traitor and murderess as surely as any other traitor and murderess there has ever been in the world? Haven't I done as wickedly to Rollo as if I had taken a knife and stabbed him to the heart and he had looked up at me with his dying eyes——"

She broke off, and for a moment covered her face with her hands. He brushed his hat assiduously with his coat sleeve, and looked down.

"And what have I done for Randal?" she continued after a moment, in a voice in which there was a threatening of tears. "Haven't I dragged him down? Hasn't he become a thief and a liar for my sake? Is there anything I have done to him for which he can thank me?"

"As to that," said Jean, "men aren't ruined unless they choose to be. There is no such thing as shifting the responsibility of one's sins on to another person's shoulders."

"But there are such things as *influences* in the world, and mine over him has been entirely for evil. My influence over every one is always for evil, and I wonder why God made me, for I only cumber the earth, and I wish I were dead."

She held out her hand to him again, and her mouth trembled.

"Good-bye," she said. "I think I'm going to cry, and I would rather you went away. You can't do any good."

"No," said Ingram, "I'm afraid I can't. I wish I could." He was holding her hand in a strong, kind grasp, and his voice was very gentle. Then, seeing that she was nearly on

the point of tears, he dropped it hastily. "I will remember your message to England," he said in a different tone, and he went out without further delay.

"Poor little girl!" he ejaculated to himself as he walked down the Avenue Marceau on the shady side of the way. "I wonder whether it's *he* that has failed her, or whether it's conventionality that's too strong for her?" The sky to which he looked for a solution of this problem gave him no information. "Or is it," he added after a pause, "that morbid craving that women have after crucifixion, and a mortifying of the flesh. They can't be satisfied with just enjoying themselves. They prefer peas in their boots, and cold, damp stones to pray on. All women—all women who are not she-devils, that is to say—have the cloister spirit, and must sacrifice their lives to something that strikes them as ideal—even if it only takes the form of a drunken husband. I suppose he only kisses her. It would make it easier for her if he ill-treated her and went headlong to the devil. It is a crucifix she wants, I suspect."

If Luigia cried when Ingram left her there was, at any rate, no trace of tears about her that evening when De Morne and Captain Grey joined her and Lord Egan at dinner in the open air. They never remembered to have seen her in such good spirits. She talked with the languid brilliancy that had fascinated and bewildered Lord Egan so often in the old days. She was excited, and her cheeks burned with fire. She wanted to do something—go somewhere. What did they say to driving in the Bois in the dark? What was there on at La Comédie Française? Would a *cafe-chantant* in the Champs Elysées be amusing? They must do something at once. She insisted. She hated sitting still.

They drove as she suggested, in the Bois in the dark, and afterwards sat under the trees in the Champs Elysées, listening to the music. The gentlemen smoked and drank *vermouth*. Luigia insisted on smoking too.

"Why shouldn't I?" she said, in answer to the look in Lord Egan's eyes. "I see it is quite the thing to do?" And she glanced at a notorious leader of the *demi-monde* who

was seated, cigarette in mouth, with a party of gentlemen at the next table.

Lord Egan made no objection, and, turning a little away from her, entered into a conversation with Captain Grey on the subject of a horse he was thinking of buying from him. Luigia lighted her cigarette and De Morne gave her a lesson in the art of smoking it. His bored manner had dropped from him, and his tired eyes had grown eager. Luigia, whether she could smoke or not, knew by instinct how to use a cigarette as a delicate weapon of coquetry.

It was late when they returned to the Avenue Marceau, and De Morne and Captain Gray came in for a few minutes. The matter of the horse had not been definitely settled, it seemed.

The *salon* was lighted by shaded lamps, the long windows were open. Luigia threw aside her wraps and went out on the balcony; the excitement of her manner had died down, and a tired, white look had come into her face. She stood on the balcony, leaning her bare arms on the iron rail, looking at Paris in the moonlight. Sad, haunting thoughts were crowding on her, and she could not escape them. De Morne followed her, but he no longer found her an exhilarating companion.

"Have another cigarette!" he said presently after a long pause.

"No, thank you."

"You should. A pretty woman never looks so pretty as when she is smoking."

"Do you think so?"

"I thought so to-night."

She was silent.

"Do you know what I said to myself as I looked at you?" He leaned towards her as she turned her eyes on him. "When I saw that cigarette between your lips I said they were made for—something better!" He stooped lower, and touched them ever so lightly with his own! Then he waited to see what she would do. He was not much given to timidity in his dealings with women, but he was not sure

of Luigia, and had never attempted anything of the sort with her before.

For one instant her eyes flashed at him, and then she looked down on the street below, leaning her chin on her hand and her elbow on the rail. She said nothing, but he fancied she had grown a shade paler in the moonlight. He looked at her in silence. There was something in the expression of her profile that chilled him more utterly than any torrent of indignant words could have done.

"I beg your pardon," he said almost involuntarily.

"You need not," she said. "It was my fault."

"Your fault?"

"Yes. Men don't attempt these things unless women give them the right." She spoke in a tired voice, as though she had very little interest in discussing the subject.

"I'm sorry——"

"There is no need," she said again. "It doesn't really matter."

There was a pause. "You have mistaken me, that is all," she said presently; "but how were you to know? You only know my position here. Let me speak in its defence. I *do* defend it. It is no sin."

De Morne tried to make some little conventional reply, but she interrupted him.

"It is loveless marriages that are the sin," she said. "It is the men and women who marry without love who have lost their honour. It is they whom society should shun."

"Oh, I dare say," he said carelessly. He was aware, though without being much troubled at the thought, that the present Honourable Mrs. De Morne would scarcely have borne his name had she not been backed by extensive manufactories of tinned meats in New York. But he did not think it necessary to mention the fact.

"I was married when I was a child," she went on—"before I knew what love meant. My marriage was not a sin—only a great mistake. Now I know what love is, and I say it is more sacred than any loveless marriage can ever be."

"I'm awfully sorry for you," he said with some embarrassment.

"I don't need your pity," she returned proudly. "We shall be married very soon; and, in the mean time, in his eyes and my own eyes and the eyes of God, I am truly his wife. There is nothing to pity me for."

She moved towards the window to go back into the room, and De Morne said hurriedly, in a low voice, "You forgive me?"

"Oh, it is already forgiven and forgotten," she said carelessly. "It was such a *small* thing. If a wasp or a beetle crept over my hand it might be unpleasant for the moment, but do you think I should ever think of it again?"

De Morne left a minute after in a subdued manner that was new to him, and Lord Egan accompanied him and Captain Grey down the stairs. When he came back Luigia was waiting for him in the middle of the room.

"It may interest you to know—though I don't know why it should particularly"—she said, "that your friend Mr. De Morne kissed me just now while we were out on the balcony."

She spoke as calmly as though she were telling him something that was almost of no account, but into Lord Egan's eyes, as he stood in the doorway, there flashed a look of sudden fury.

"Confound him!" he ejaculated. Then he closed the door and walked over to her deliberately. "What did you do?" he said in a very level tone.

"Do? Nothing. Why should I?"

"What did you *say*, then? Good heavens! What did you say to him?—the brute!"

"I said it didn't matter."

He took hold of her arms and looked into her face.

"What do you mean?" he said, and though his manner was still quiet, his face was white and his eyes were full of fury.

"Don't. You are hurting me."

"Give me an answer. Why did you let De Morne kiss you?"

"Why shouldn't he? Why should I resent it? Am I

not a creature just to be kissed? *He only took me for what I am!*"

She flung off his hands and flung out her arms, still standing in the middle of the room.

"You see what men think of me?" she cried.

"No, I don't," he said doggedly. "Anyway, *I* don't."

"Oh, you do, you do! Every one does. I am an outcast, and have no rights. They think they can do as they like—and they can. I have made it clear beyond a doubt." She began to pace the room. "Was it worth it?" she went on in a rapid, breathless way. "Were a few kisses worth this fathomless degradation—all this awful sense of desolation? Is it life at all? Can any good come of it? Is there one single redeeming point about it?"

"You didn't say this at first."

"Oh no. At first we talked about the election of the heart and the true bond of love and all sorts of other pretty fallacies. We had only just cut our throats then, and the deed looked courageous, and had a sort of mock heroism about it. But, now that we are dead—quite dead—does it strike you in the same light? Do you still think the election of the soul outweighs every other consideration in heaven and earth and all the other parts of the universe?"

"Your feeling for me can't be worth much if——"

"There I agree with you. It is worth very little. Is it worth your manhood and honour and your being able to look the whole world in the face? Oh, it isn't love at all! It's an evil, ugly thing, with an evil, ugly name, and men know it and trade on it, and treat me as I am only fit to be treated."

He stood looking at her with the cloud deepening on his face.

"I must drown thought," she went on. "It doesn't do to think, for thinking brings remorse, and remorse means despair. I must smother my better self and live for the moment, like a thing without a soul. And that's what I tried to do to-night, and I shall go on trying to do it more and more, till at last I get to the place where there is no

more suffering because there is no more shame. This is only the beginning of the end."

"What end?"

"The end of the woman who rushes headlong down a steep place. Oh, don't look at me like that! I can do it—I can do it all—paint, brandy, jewels, the price of men's souls——"

"Luigia," he said suddenly, in a tone of authority, "I won't allow this sort of talk. You belong to me, and when we are married——"

"Married! Do you think we shall ever be married? Oh, I know better. There are months and months before that can happen, and before then you will have seen some one else——"

"Have I ever given you cause to say such a thing?"

"Besides, what can marriage do for us now?" she cried, ignoring his interruption. "Can it wipe out the past—all the treachery and deceit and cruelty? Oh, don't come near me!—don't touch me! I hate you!—I hate you, I tell you, and I hate myself and my whole life!"

His face changed, and he turned away. He walked to the further end of the room, and taking up a newspaper, sat down with his back to her.

"If you hate me," he said coldly, "we have indeed made an irretrievable mistake."

She went out on to the balcony again, and stood there in the cool night air, trying to still the emotions that were warring within her. Gradually her excitement died down. Half an hour passed; the clocks in the city from far and near struck the hour of midnight. With a little shiver she went back into the room and over to Lord Egan.

"Randal," she said in an unsteady voice.

"Well?" He did not look up.

"I—didn't mean it."

"Didn't mean what?"

"That I don't—like you."

He looked up slowly; his lips trembled.

"I do—I do," she cried, and sitting down on his knee, re-

gardless of the paper, she put her arms gently round his neck. "I love you," she whispered.

"I don't think you do," he said. But he drew her closer and kissed her very tenderly.

"But I do—and you *know* it."

"Sometimes I more than doubt it."

"Oh, but it is there—*behind*. Remember that, whatever I may say or do. To-day has been torture to me—a nightmare of defiance and shame. Let me bear it in any way I can."

"My poor little darling, what can I do to make it easier?"

"Only love me."

"But you say that isn't enough?"

"Sometimes it is worth everything else in creation, and sometimes it doesn't seem worth the first tiny speck on the whiteness of one's soul. I can't explain."

"What am I to do, then?"

"Only go on loving me, if you can."

"If I can!"

He kissed the hair lying just below his lips, and then he kissed her mouth. There was a long silence, the two dark heads were close together, her cheek was pressed to his.

"Only go on loving me," she whispered, lifting her head at last, "and I think I can bear it all. Hold me tighter—closer. Let me be *sure*—for there is nothing and no one else."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FEARS.

In June one of the English doctors in Florence was sent for to attend an Englishman lying dangerously ill with fever. He drove out at sunset to the address given. It was that of a palace belonging to one of the Italian nobles which

had been let during the spring, and which lay just beyond the city. In the *loggia* a girl was waiting for him, leaning on the marble balustrade, and keeping watch down the drive. She came forward to meet him.

"He has been delirious for some hours," she said, "and he only fell ill this morning. I thought you would *never* come."

The doctor explained that he had many patients, and had been delayed. She stood for a moment listening to what he had to say, with the evening sunshine falling softly on her. She was a pale, dark girl, uncommon looking, with a poetic rather than a pretty face, and very soft eyes. She wore the crispest and freshest of *negligé* tea-gowns of white muslin, with knots of saffron-coloured ribbon here and there in its frillings. He classed her in his own mind as a "fine lady," who would be altogether useless in a case of illness.

She led him through an open window, into a stately bedroom, with a lofty ceiling and a marble floor. A maid dozing in a chair at the bedside rose and withdrew to the further end of the room.

The patient was a young man, apparently about six-and-twenty years of age, and at the first examination of him the doctor's face became very grave.

"What do you think of him?" asked the girl, confronting him with steadfast eyes.

"You are his wife?"

She signed assent with a movement of her head. He turned his back on his patient.

"He is very ill," he said, "very ill indeed. You must get a trained nurse at once."

"That is unnecessary. I shall nurse him myself."

"You? My dear lady, you will break down in a day."

"Try me."

"Nonsense!" said the doctor bluntly. "Besides, no inexperienced person is ever half so good as a woman who has been trained to it."

"And there is no woman, trained or otherwise, who could nurse him as I shall." She lifted her head proudly.

"I am fond of him, you see," she said, "and that has so much to do with it. Try me," she said again, and with a slight smile she held out her hand to him. "Is it cool? Is the pulse steady? Oh, you may trust me. I shall not break down."

"Promises cannot control human nature, my dear Mrs. Fayne," he said, holding her hand kindly in his own. "Your will is not omnipotent."

"Determination can do a great deal," she said, withdrawing her hand, "and I mean to nurse him *through* it. Now tell me what to do."

He gave way, as men have given way before to wilful women, and he soon found he had no reason to doubt her capability. For a week she stood to her post, strong, calm, tender, devoted, obeying his directions with implicit obedience, even in the matter which is sometimes more difficult to manage, of taking proper food and rest herself. Once, at the crisis of the fever, he was summoned at midnight. He found her sitting over the wood fire, still in the daintiest of muslin gowns, with a fresh, sweet-smelling bunch of cloves pinned at her throat. She had made herself pretty for those fever-stricken eyes even at this, the eleventh hour, when it might well have been excused her. She rose as the doctor entered, and her eyes were steadfast and calm.

"He is very ill," she said.

He was, indeed. Fearing the worst he tried to prepare her a little. She looked him fully in the face.

"You mean that he will die?" she said. Then, taking the sick man's hot hand in hers, "Oh no, he will not die."

"Life and death are not in our hands, my dear madam."

"Not altogether. But God is on my side this time. He does not mean him to die—neither do I."

Three hours afterwards the doctor drove home in the cool of the early morning.

"A singular girl!" he ejaculated to himself. "A most singular girl! How she loves him! She almost seemed to keep him back by sheer force of will, for I don't know what else saved him. But he'll pull through now, thanks to her!"

He was in a reflective mood, and as he drove along the road towards the city, with the beauty of the coming day flushing the sky, and the scent of the unfolding flowers rising from the fields, it seemed to him that he had missed something very beautiful in life. If he—short, stout, worthy John Smith—were to lie grievously ill, and at the point of death, would his Maria fight for his life, and tend upon him with that restrained, passionate fervour? He smiled at the idea. Yet there was something to be said in Maria's defence: she was stout and clumsy, and her eyes were incapable of expressing passionate fervour. If she were devoted, it was in her own way, and her own way was not pretty. Ah, there lay the difference! In his honest, busy life there had been missing that subtile element of beauty called *romance*, which either changes commonplace existence into a golden dream, or burns it up with a fire that leaves one dry and parched for the rest of one's life.

A week later Luigia led her invalid proudly forth into the sunshine of the *loggia* to lie and bask in the Italian warmth of the afternoon.

"You are a perfect nurse," he said, as she arranged the pillows around him and took her place at his side.

"Yes? Well, people can generally do a thing when their whole heart and soul is set upon the matter. No one else could have nursed as I did. I put my life into yours. I don't believe you *could* have died. I *made* you breathe, *made* you swallow, *made* you sleep. I fought with the fever and drove it out. Do you believe in such force of will? I do. I felt it in me so strongly that I knew it must win in the end. I wasn't much afraid when the doctor thought you would die."

"I wasn't worth it," he said, turning away his head.

He was still very weak, and tears were gathering in his eyes.

"You were worth it to me," she said. Then, with a sudden, tender smile, "Tears, Randal? Well, why mayn't I see them? Are you not all mine—tears as well as everything else?" and she stooped and kissed his cheek with passionate tenderness.

To complete his recovery they went to Switzerland, and lived in the mountains, moving from place to place as the spirit led them. They were travelling under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Fayne—Fayne being Lord Egan's family name—and here, at least, nothing of their story was known. It was here, too, that they received news from England that their case had been tried in the Divorce Court, and a decree *nisi* proclaimed, which in six months' time would be made absolute. They would then be free to marry if they wished. Lord Egan cursed the tardiness of the English law, and Luigia wept over the lawyer's letter for half a day. Then Justine brought in tea and a new French novel, and Lord Egan went down by himself to table-d'hôte and made himself witty over the fricasseed frogs for the benefit of his sunburnt, sixteen-year-old companion, who giggled at everything he said.

He was very grateful to Luigia for her devotion to him during his illness, and he told her so several times, and repaid her with a great many kisses, but when he rose from that bed of sickness there was a slight—at first an almost imperceptible—change in their relationship toward each other. She had contracted a bad habit of waiting on him and considering him at every turn, and of fetching things he wanted while he lay at his ease on the sofa, and although this was right enough during his convalescence, sad to say, it continued after he was well again. It is convenient to have a woman at hand who always knows where everything is, who is anxious to search for mislaid tobacco-pouches, truant pipes, and make one comfortable with cushions; it is too convenient a state of things to be easily cast aside, and he clung to it with affection. It was so natural to take the only sofa or the easiest chair while he was an invalid, and who was to say when the exact moment of recovery had arrived? Certainly not Luigia, who, pale, languid, and tired, sat upright in a hard chair while he reclined gracefully on the cushions.

She was always pale and languid and tired now, and he got used to it and thought little of it; she had lost a great deal of her spirit too, and was not the exhilarating compan-

ion she once had been. When she talked her voice was listless, her eyes had a way of looking too big for her face, and she did not laugh easily. Of course, he loved her just as much as ever, and he liked to pet her and caress her and call her endearing names, but the excitement of his intercourse with her was waning a little. When she had been strange, wonderful, unknown, who so devoted as he? Now that she had fallen to the familiarity of everyday life, was *quite* so much devotion necessary? Mere women are, after all, comparatively tame things. There had been a time when Luigia had appeared to him a being all-powerful, able almost to strike death with her eyes, and slay by a word; now she seemed to him very small and helpless. He had come near to her and sounded the depths of her littleness. She could not kill with her eyes—he had seen them fill with tears over the merest trifles; her words were not omnipotent—he had found that he could stop them with a kiss; he was no longer afraid of her, she was no more terrible to him than his own hands, his own feet. It was not so interesting, perhaps, dealing with a mere woman, but it had its compensations—in the cushion-bringing, pipe-finding line. He was not altogether dissatisfied with the exchange. One cannot always live at fever heat, and if the poetry of love was disappearing and the prose of commonplace taking its place, what of that? They were getting used to each other, that was all.

The mountain air was bracing, and in a few weeks his recovery was completely effected, but with returning strength came a desire for something more than Luigia's society. He was tired of lying about on the grass doing nothing, he said, and there wasn't a decent game of billiards to be got at any of the hotels. What did she say to going back to Monte Carlo? De Morne and one or two others he knew were there, and in a place like that there was always something to do. She objected. She did not like De Morne, and she did not like his influence over him (though this latter objection she was wise enough to keep to herself), and Monte Carlo would be so hot in the end of July. Oh no, it wouldn't, he assured her; places on the coast were

never hot—there was always a sea-breeze. If that were all, he could take a villa in the hills and drive into Monte Carlo every day. She wouldn't find *that* hot. Anyway, they could go and try it, and if they didn't like it they could come away again. Nothing easier. She said no more, since she saw his heart was set on it, and so they went, but she found it terribly hot, as she had predicted, and all the strength she had deserted her, and it seemed too great an exertion to even move or speak. But they stayed all the same. August and September passed away, and she lived comparatively alone in the villa on the hills, and he spent his days in Monte Carlo with De Morne and his other friends in the manifold ways that young men have of "killing time."

He did not mean to neglect her; but to her, sitting alone day after day, it felt very like neglect. Who had she to talk to but Justine? They sat together sewing for hours and hours, and Justine chatted away in French about her old home in Alsace, and all her varied experiences with former mistresses, and Luigia listened and tried to interest herself in the tales, but all the time her mind was full of other things. She did not—how could she?—utter one word on the matters that were of absorbing interest to herself. Justine was only a maid, and, anyway, she knew nothing of her story. She never could bring herself to even speak of the object for which all these tiny garments were being made, though she gave directions and measured tucks, and she and Justine stitched diligently at them for hours every day. In the evening, when the fiercest of the heat was over, she would walk out by herself a little way up the steep road behind the villa, and sit down somewhere to look over the sea and think—and think—and think.

How was the venture turning out? She was beginning to realize how little fulfilment comes up to expectation, how inevitably bad is mingled with good. She possessed her love, but was it what she had imagined? She had expected an eternity of blind worship, a dwelling for ever in a blissful illusion, in which the world around them was nothing, and they were all in all to each other. What was the

reality? They were only a man and a woman after all, and the world around them was the same old world they had known and struggled with from the first! It was no more heaven on earth than the old life had been. She loved him certainly, but love for a very faulty man means inevitable suffering. She was loyal to him, and tried to excuse him, even to herself. He was certainly selfish, but who had ever taught him to be otherwise? He was easily influenced by his companions, and had certain tendencies that might ultimately develop into vices. Yes; but how much might not a *good* woman do for him? How could she attempt to keep him straight when she had done her utmost to send him wrong? If she were only different, he would be different too! This gambling too, this dangerous love of gambling, was it not all Mr. De Morne's fault? Did he not entice him into it? And if he left her alone a good deal, was it not only natural that he should find De Morne a more fascinating companion than she was just now?

Oh, she knew it—she felt it—the infatuation was over, and some day the love would go too, and then how would it be? Could he possibly love her as he once had done, when he spent whole days and nights away from her? Sometimes he would go to Monte Carlo early in the afternoon and play all night, coming home only after the sun of the next day had risen. Once—but she could not bear to think of that—he had come back in the small hours of the morning, assisted by a friend, flushed, dishevelled, thick in speech; and she, who was sitting up waiting for him, had received him with a heart that literally fainted with horror. But no one in the household had ever known of this; she had hidden it carefully; Justine had not suspected it, and she did not even rouse the valet, whose hours were irregular, and who had fallen into noisy slumber in the ante-room while waiting for his master. No, no one had known it; but oh, it was horrible! and it might happen again any day, any hour. She knew that De Morne was constantly intoxicated, and while under his influence how could she be sure of anything? She had a feeling that the only thing she had in the world, the thing for which she had flung away every-

thing else, was failing her. But even if it were so, what could she do? Character and circumstances must work out their own destiny, and there is no such thing as stopping them with a few words.

It was the beginning of a great tragedy—the tragedy of a delusive love that is doomed to die by inches. She had thrown over everything for its sake, and what had it given her in return? Not even companionship, for only a surface companionship is possible between two people who live entirely for themselves. True communion of spirit was denied them, because the soul and all its aspirations and desires are founded on things that are deep and true, and things that were deep and true they dare not face, dared not go near—even in words.

One evening in the beginning of October she sat by herself in the darkness, trying over one of her old songs. Lord Egan was out, as usual; Justine was flirting with his valet somewhere in their own regions; the rooms were empty, silent.

To get away from her thoughts she had recourse to music, but even in the words of the song she was singing she seemed to hear the story of her own life. She sang over the last verse several times, giving the words a meaning of her own.

> "The desire of the Moth for the Star,
> Of the Night for the Morrow,
> The devotion to Something afar,
> From the sphere of our Sorrow."

Why all this longing, this vain endeavour? What does it come to in the end? Nothing! Does the Moth ever reach the Star, or the Night possess the Morrow? Never! never! The struggle is doomed from the very beginning. Why try, then? Because the human heart is so made that it cannot be satisfied without endeavour of some sort—it may be a noble endeavour, it may be a low one; but struggle it must. It is useless to tell it that all is in vain—it is seeking for something, and will go on seeking to the end.

"The devotion to something afar from the sphere of our

sorrow." Yes, that was left her; no illusive star, no shadowy morrow, but a great uplifting of the whole soul towards the things that are not of this world at all. That could still be hers; but did she dare to lift her eyes? How was she to look Eternity in the face, and put out her hand towards higher things—she who was living low down in the dust? No, she did not dare; the past rose up and mocked her at the very thought.

Lord Egan entered the room unexpectedly, and, coming behind her, took her chin in his two hands, and turned up her face to be kissed.

"Congratulate me, little woman," he said, "I've won £800."

"You are back very early," she said.

"Yes, but De Morne had to go, so I came too. But what's this? Been crying?"

"A little."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"You must know. You can't cry for nothing."

"It's only that I've been thinking."

"You shouldn't think. You should get Justine to sit with you."

"I am tired of Justine."

"Well, then, get another maid—one you like better."

"Oh, I like her, but naturally, as I never see anybody else, I get a little tired of her." There was a touch of petulance in her voice.

"Don't push me away. What have I done? My sweet one, are you angry with me? You mustn't be, for I haven't seen you all day, and I came back now——"

"You saw me for an hour this morning. Surely that was enough!"

"Why do you speak like that? I can't help it, you know. But De Morne is going away next week, and after that I shall be more free."

She said nothing.

"I can't take you with me everywhere, can I?" he went on, coaxing her with caresses. "You wouldn't like it if I

did. But after De Morne is gone we will see a great deal more of each other, won't we?"

"I don't want to see more of you."

"What? Are you getting tired of me, too? Am I to be banished with Justine? Luigia, darling, why are you so cross with me? No, be still—I want to kiss you—I *will* kiss you, if I like."

"If you stayed with me it would only be because you had nothing else to do. Yesterday you were out all day with Mr. De Morne; and look at the beginning of the week! —you were away two whole days in the yacht with him and Mr. Hayes."

"But you don't like the yacht. You said so. I wanted you to come——"

"Yes, I know. But we don't like the same things, and I am only a drag on you and a nuisance and——"

"My life, you are everything in the world to me. What else have I to live for?"

"Oh, your men friends, your yacht, billiards, roulette——"

"Luigia! As though one of them was worth a single hair of your head to me!"

"It doesn't matter," pushing his hand away. "Only I am not used to being neglected."

"Neglected! Is there any mortal thing you want that I wouldn't get for you, my darling?"

"All the riches of the world can be mine," she said bitterly, "but the Star and the Morrow are out of reach. And it is they, and they only, that I have always wanted."

He did not understand her—how should he? But he did his best in the way of caresses, and she said no more on the subject. She knew that it was useless. No words will bring back the allegiance of the heart. Her thoughts went back to the squire—his forethought, his unselfishness, his wonderful love and tenderness. Oh, she knew well enough which was the better of the two men, which was the most worthy of her devotion. The past rose up against her again as a bitter reproach, and the future loomed before her full of difficulties she knew not how to face.

Yes, she trembled for the future; it seemed to her that the only person she had to trust to in the world was going to fail her at every turn. Not only were there the humiliations of society to endure, but something harder—the killing, step by step, of her love for a man who was not worthy. She loved him still, passionately—and with pain, since he failed her and degraded himself in her eyes; but how long does love last, how much will it bear? She foresaw a future in which the pain would be greater than the love, and yet another in which there was neither love nor pain, but indifference and contempt—the burying-place of something that once was beautiful, the end of one of the saddest tragedies that is ever played on the stage of this world.

He had come home that morning just at sunrise, haggard and heavy-eyed, having lost a larger sum of money than he dared to realize; and to drown thought he had been drinking. He had flung himself, fully dressed as he was, on his bed, and had remained there all day; only his valet had been to him. Luigia, with a new dread in her heart, had gone out for a solitary walk in the afternoon.

She passed a wayside cross with a figure of the Saviour hanging on it. At its base garlands of wild flowers were strewn, and bunches of daisies put there by children. There was a place on the stone, worn by much kneeling, where passers-by for generations had stopped to offer up their prayers. She would like to have stopped too, and prayed for help and comfort, but she went on, down the road towards the blue sea, shining in the glow of sunset. Below were thick groves of ilex and myrtle, with here and there the white walls of a villa peeping between. She sat down on a broken wall, gazing out to sea, with eyes that were dwelling on the past, or trying fearfully to pierce the veil of the future.

Evening came on, the light faded on the sea and died away in the sky, the woods were shrouded in dusk, a convent bell was ringing in the distance, the road was deserted. She turned to go back, toiling slowly up it, for it was steep and stony. When she came to the wayside crucifix, she stopped before it, and, with the instinct of her mother's peo-

ple, knelt down on the worn stone among the dying flowers. Words broke from her in a passionate petition to the Unseen. "Oh God," she whispered, "I come to You at last! I have no right to come, but oh, be merciful to me! Keep my heart from breaking, or, if it breaks, give me strength to bear it. Help me to endure. And if our love dies, let me *still* be faithful to him, very patient, very tender. I give up my desires, my happiness, everything, only let me never fail him. I have done my best to ruin him, let me now do all I can to save him. Give me strength to bear the future."

As she rose from her knees, a peasant driving a mule in the road glanced at her in the dusk, crossed himself as he went by the crucifix, and passed on. She turned her face homewards, with a new love and courage in her heart.

At the house she found everything in a state of hurry and confusion; Justine grumbling and indignant at the sudden upset, packing as hard as she could pack, Lord Egan's valet doing the same at his master's order, and Lord Egan himself, surrounded by time-tables and telegram-forms, scribbling on a bit of paper with a preoccupied air. He looked up as she entered; his face and manner were full of suppressed excitement.

"Where in the world have you been?" he exclaimed. "I have been looking for you everywhere. The English post came in an hour ago, and—— Read this!"

He pushed forward a newspaper, and pointed to a notice among the deaths. He looked over her shoulder as she read it in silence.

"*On the 5th inst., at the Manor House, Rodney, Deneshire, Thomas Rodney, suddenly, of heart disease, in his 64th year.*"

She lifted her head and looked at him with startled eyes, the colour drained slowly from her cheeks and lips.

"We must go to England at once, and be married," he said, with the same suppressed eagerness. "I'm looking out trains and boats. I've told them to begin packing, but you'd better speak to Justine yourself. Can you be ready——"

He stopped. She was looking at him vaguely, with a strange expression in her eyes, she was putting out her hands towards him with an instinctive groping for support. He caught hold of her, and the next instant she had fainted dead away, without warning, for the second time in her life.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE "SILENT SEA."

Boats and trains and coaches were all accommodating, and did their best to aid that headlong flight to England, and at first everything went well. But "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," and that divinity sent forth a decree that there was no possibility of disobeying. Again a stern voice was heard saying "Thus far and no farther shalt thou go," and on the coast of France, almost within sight of English shores, the travellers abandoned their journey and took refuge in an inn.

Luigia was taken ill, a doctor was sent for, and a nurse; all that night lights burned in the inn, and people hurried to and fro. The next day another doctor was called in for consultation, and Lord Egan interviewed him in one of the inn parlours.

He was a little, dapper Frenchman, with a clever face and a rising reputation. He told him, as gently as he could, that there was no hope—no hope whatever. Lord Egan waved aside the assertion, he did not choose to believe it, he wished for some higher opinion, he should telegraph to an authority in Paris to come at once, he should be obliged for the names and addresses of one or two of the celebrities in the medical world.

The doctor explained that he could telegraph if he liked, but that it would be absolutely useless. No one could possibly arrive in time, it was only a question of a few hours. Lord Egan gave him to understand that he was a fool, who

did not know his business, and that he should telegraph all the same.

He did so, and then, haggard and sick at heart with apprehension, went back to the room where Luigia lay.

It was a large room, and in confusion—trunks standing about open and half unpacked, piles of frilled white petticoats and dainty muslin wrappers lying on the floor where they had been put in the hasty search for something else; the dressing-table was littered with things that do not, as a rule, belong to dressing-tables, a hat and travelling cloak lay on a chair. The windows were open and the blinds lowered, but a bar of golden light lay near the sill, and there was a flood of sun on the floor below. Away in the distance could be heard the faint boom of the waves as they beat upon the shore, a far-off clock struck two, and these sounds and the irrepressible sobbing of Justine at the bedside broke the silence. The doctor who had first attended Luigia was standing at her side, the nurse had gone into an inner room with a bundle of shawls in her arms. Lord Egan came up to the bedside.

"Go," he said harshly to Justine, pointing to the door, and, still sobbing violently, she rose and left the room. Then he looked at the doctor.

"Leave me alone with her," he said haughtily, and the doctor, who had dealt before with frantic young husbands, and never resented anything they did or said, withdrew for a minute to the inner room as he was desired.

Left alone, Lord Egan stood looking down silently on the still form amongst the pillows. She was lying exactly as he had left her half an hour before—white, stricken, motionless, with eyes closed and pale lips slightly parted. Her dark hair streamed around her in fine, long strands; it was wet on her forehead, where they had been dabbing it with eau de Cologne or brandy, the little tendrils near the temples were curling and straying wilfully in their old, graceful fashion.

But though her pretty hair showed signs of wilfulness, all other forms of caprice had departed from her for ever: she would never again look up and smile, she would never

again sing sweet songs, he had heard her voice for the last time in this world, she was broken down and done for utterly.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, but the action did not rouse her; he touched her hand, but she did not look up. Then he took it almost roughly in both his own and bent over her.

"Luigia," he whispered, "Luigia."

No answer.

"My darling—my own—my loved one!" he cried, his voice breaking with emotion, "only speak one word—one word——"

She moved slightly and opened her eyes. He gazed down into them, and it seemed to him that they were the eyes of some creature driven to extremity in the hour of its doom—eyes that were filled with a dread of leaving all that was known, and a still greater terror of what was coming. Perhaps he only imagined it, for the glimpse was but momentary and the lashes had dropped again the next instant. "Oh, God help her!" he cried out, and he dragged her into his arms and kissed her on her hands, her pale mouth, her wet hair. "Oh, my love!—my love!—my love!" he cried passionately, again and again.

Her head fell feebly to one side and sank upon his shoulder, his eyes filled with blinding tears. Oh, it was death!—it was death! he knew it now, and was powerless to fight her battle for her; the awful thing had got hold of her, and was stronger than he was in spite of all his love.

The doctor came forward with a word of warning. He must let her alone if he did not wish to kill her outright. It was a brutal thing to say, perhaps, but strong words were necessary.

He moved and tried to go away, but a strand of her hair had caught in his sleeve-link and he could not disentangle it. The doctor did it for him, as his own hands were trembling too violently to be of any use. He paced up and down the room, with clenched hands and teeth set, the tears still in his eyes. The nurse kept carefully out of his way; he was not in a mood to be interfered with.

The hours passed, the light on the floor altered its shape, got smaller, crept towards the wainscot, rose, inch by inch, up the wall. The ascent was slow, but its very slowness was torture to him. He went to the window and pulled aside the blind. The sun was sinking behind the sea, the water was flooded with dazzling light, there was a pathway across it, leading out to the West, to the "Silent Sea," where "His islands lift their fronded palms in air." To that Silent Sea Luigia was now drifting out—slowly, slowly, as the sun went down. There was no sound from the bed; the nurse came in now and then to look at her; the doctor, who had been out to another patient, came back, and felt her pulse and heart again. She was still just alive.

Later on the end came, as the flushing light faded on the sea. It was almost imperceptible. The nurse stood fanning her with one of her ballroom fans, hastily unpacked by Justine; the doctor kept his hand upon her pulse.

Lord Egan stood at the foot of the bed, his arms folded on its rail, watching the ebbing of the life he loved. He felt as though his own life were going from him in great throbs of pain. But there was nothing to be done, no last words were possible, she was already far out towards the Silent Sea, and could not hear his voice if he spoke to her. There was no kiss, no whisper, no sort of parting between these two, who had given all they had to give to be together. In a stillness that was profound, Luigia lay drifting, drifting, and he never knew the precise moment when the ebb of the tide had taken her beyond his reach.

The doctor laid down her hand, and said something to him in a low voice. He did not know what it was, but he understood well enough what he meant. He lifted his arms from the rail of the bed, and turned away and went out, through the town, now beginning to glimmer with lights, and down to the seashore. There he walked on and on for miles. The glow in the sky died down, and the waves beat on the shore with a soft splash, and the moon rose and the stars came out. But he saw no moon, no stars; it seemed to him that the light of the world had gone out for ever with the flickering light of the life he loved. At last, in exhaustion,

he flung himself face downwards on the stony beach, and prayed passionately that he might die too. The twinkling lights in the scattered farmhouses died out, and only the moon and stars looked down on him from the deep, dark sky, and still he lay there, far on into the night, unconscious of all save his irreparable loss.

The day of the funeral was wet, and the little churchyard on the hillside was lashed with rain as the procession wound into it late in the afternoon. Daubigny and Lord Egan were the only mourners, and together they stood, bareheaded, at the grave of the woman whom they had both loved and wronged. The words of the burial service, more awful and solemn than any man ever uttered, came across the open grave to them in their last clamouring appeal for the departed spirit—

"*Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower, he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased. Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.*"

The sobbing of women from the village, who had followed, and stood a little way off, could be heard in the stillness that succeeded these words, and then came the heavy thud of the sodden earth as it was flung on to the coffin. Lord Egan turned and left the churchyard without waiting for the rest of the service. He walked through the rain—anywhere, he did not care where—blind and deaf to all but that which was in his own heart.

"What have I done?" he kept asking himself again and again—"what have I done to her?" And the answer that came to him was always the same: "*Eternal death!—the bitter pains of eternal death!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE THIRD GENERATION.

Two years after Luigia's death the Abbey opened its doors one autumn evening to its disgraced master, and it was quickly circulated through the neighbourhood that Lord Egan had returned from his voluntary exile for good. No one went near him; the Abbey was regarded with suspicion, and society waited breathless to see how he would face the situation.

On Sunday he appeared in church, a circumstance that caused much excitement among the congregation. Lady Margaret Hanope looked at him with interest from time to time, but Miss Pettigrew and her friends kept their eyes glued to their Prayer-books, refusing to cast so much as an eyelash in the direction of the sinner. The bows in their bonnets stood up and trembled with virtuous indignation—that he should come to *church*, of all places in the world!

At the end of the service he went out and passed all those gathered in the porch or churchyard, without attempting to claim acquaintance with any of his old friends. Turning into the little bypath that led through his own woods to the Abbey, he was soon lost to sight. The excited groups looked after him, talking about him in whispers. How he had changed! How old-looking he had grown! What should they do?—treat him as though nothing had happened, and thus ignore the past, or show him distinctly that they wished to have nothing whatever to do with him? It was a fortunate thing that the Harburtons had left the neighbourhood; their presence would have made everything ten times more awkward.

Every Sunday he appeared regularly in church, though in former days, when at the Abbey, he had often been absent for weeks together. Lady Margaret rallied him once on this point.

"You rival the parson in the regularity with which you come to say your prayers!" she said mockingly to him one day in the porch.

"Yes," he replied; "whoever else may stay away, I do not feel that *I* can afford to do so;" and he passed on.

She looked after him, surprised. His humility was absolute, but it was not abject; and there was a dignity in his manner that had the effect of checking impertinence. She never again dared to tackle him on any of the many points in his conduct that excited her curiosity.

Gradually it came to be understood that he was an altered man. Luigia's loss and the manner of her death had touched him to the quick; the part he had played in the tragedy stood before him in its true light; the iron of the thing had ground into his very soul, and changed its character. Of what he had done with the two years following her death he never rendered account; but whatever places, people, and events had outwardly circumvented him, it is certain that the experiences of his mind had wrought in him a radical revolution. He came back to his birthplace, and to the people he had known all his life, and faced them bravely and honestly, never attempting in the smallest degree to escape the ignominy that overshadowed him, or to palliate his sin. Slowly and carefully he picked up the broken threads of his life, put them together as well as he was able, studying his tenants, his land, his parochial duties, and sparing neither trouble nor expense in the cause of others. By degrees it became clear that he was living for something better than mere pleasure, as in former days, and, little by little, he redeemed the past and earned for himself a new reputation. On the principle that the worst sinners sometimes make the best saints, there was no more lenient master, more generous landlord, more honourable, upright man than Lord Egan in all the counties round.

It may be said that this is easy enough after the fires of passion have burnt themselves out; but is it ever easy to crucify the desire of the moment and live for an ideal alone? In this path towards the ideal of what he believed he ought to be he now went as straight and steadfastly as he could go.

Another thing. He sent for his son Luigi—the child had been born on the day of Luigia's death—and acknowl-

edged him openly, facing the truth, and putting things as they were before the world. For this he was greatly condemned, of course. His aunt, Lady Meldrum, in her yearly visits to the Abbey, did her utmost to dissuade him from such a preposterous course of action.

"To acknowledge the child as you do is ridiculous!" she exclaimed. "Of course it prejudices people against you. How can they forget the past when you drag him forward and thrust him before their eyes?"

"I have no wish to live under false colours," he replied. "I am to-day what the past has made me. I can never forget it myself, and I don't expect others to forget it."

"Still, you needn't go to such extremes. There are ways——"

"Ways that would sink me still lower in my own estimation. No; let me do what I can, little as it may be, to be honest in the present. Luigi is nearer and dearer to me than any one on earth; he is my son, and I should be a coward and a liar to disown him."

The grave eyes looked at her with a steadiness and resolution that seemed to defy her utmost endeavour, and she abandoned the subject with the reflection that it was waste of time to argue with a madman.

If Lord Egan was lenient and easy-going with servants and tenants and village malefactors, there was one person in the world to whom he was invariably just rather than merciful, and this was his son. Luigi was a boy to be proud of, handsome, daring, high-spirited, gifted; but he had his faults like his parents before him, and his father watched his development with an anxiety that was almost morbid in its intensity. The code of honour held before him was very high; no word, however lightly given, was to be broken, no deviation from the truth allowed to pass; he loved the boy deeply; but it was with a sad, self-contained sort of love, stern in its dictates and seldom expressed. He would have cut off Luigi's hands and feet, dear as he was to him, if by so doing he could have ensured his entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Luigi, of course, cared little about the Kingdom of Heaven, and fought des-

perately for the small things of this earth, and his father watched the conflict with a great anxiety in his eyes. But stern and reticent as this love for him was, Luigi never for a moment mistook Lord Egan's attitude towards him; they were the most inseparable of friends, and Luigi regarded him with an enthusiastic admiration that fell little short of worship.

Years passed, and by degrees the old story was almost forgotten. Society began to wonder why Lord Egan did not marry; who would not overlook a past that had been so nobly lived down? Lady Meldrum again endeavoured to enlighten him on the subject of his social duties.

"You must marry, my dear Randal," she said one day, "you must indeed; it's a distinct duty. If you don't, that dreadful Desmond Fayne will inherit everything, and the property will be scattered far and wide."

"It cannot be helped," said Lord Egan.

"Good gracious! don't you care! Haven't you a particle of family pride or proper feeling——"

"Oh, I care as much as you do, but there are some things that are inevitable."

"Not this. You could marry if you liked. I'm sure you've had every opportunity."

This was true. In each of her yearly visits to the Abbey, Lady Meldrum had been careful to bring an heiress in her train—Miss Van Potter, the American "millionairess"; Lady Violet, all sweet simplicity, fresh from the schoolroom; Lady Ermintrude, the daughter of a duke, with commanding features and the manner of an empress; a little Irish creature of ancient pedigree, with bewitching smiles and dimples. He had behaved very well, ridden with them, driven with them, shown them the ruins, turned over their music in the evenings, but he had never married them. Lady Meldrum was naturally exasperated.

"I'm sure you have had every opportunity given you," she cried. "Look at Lady Ermintrude! What could have been more suitable?—or Miss Van Potter, a charming girl!—or dear Edith, who sang so sweetly—you said yourself how delightfully——"

"My dear Aunt Emily, what is the use of all this discussion? Your friends are welcome to stay here as long as they like—I'm delighted to have them, and they seem to like the ruins and all that, and I hope they will come again—but as to marriage with any of them, that is out of the question."

"But why?—why?—why?" cried her ladyship, forgetting her dignity in exasperation.

"Is it necessary to explain?"—he turned his back on her, and walked off a few paces. "To me it seems that the only rag of honour left me is to be loyal to the past."

"It is ridiculous! preposterous! mad! No other man would dream of letting it stand in his way."

"Other men's rules are not necessarily mine."

"You are *mad!*" she cried, sweeping from the room, "and I shall take no further trouble in the matter."

And, to the astonishment of everybody, the Abbey remained without a mistress till that scapegrace, Desmond Fayne, brought his pretty actress-wife to reign over its time-honoured hearth, and startle the old walls with her loud, vacant laugh.

One day, when Luigi was about thirteen years of age, it came to Lord Egan's ears that he had been fighting with a boy in the village. At dinner he observed that his lip was cut and swollen, but as the tutor dined with them, he made no inquiries on the subject till they were alone. When the tutor had gone and Luigi had flung himself into an arm-chair on the hearth with a book, Lord Egan walked over to him and looked down into the disfigured and still lowering face.

"Have you been fighting, Luigi?" he said suddenly.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because a fellow cheeked me."

"What fellow?"

"A fellow called Price. His father has a lot of ferrets, and I go out ratting with him sometimes."

"But, my dear boy, I can't have you fighting the boys in the village like that. It's disreputable—it won't do——"

"I shall fight any one who cheeks me and tells lies."

"What were the lies?"

"Oh, nothing." He was sitting sideways in the great chair, swinging his leg over its arm, the effect of the scowl on his handsome young face somewhat marred by the comic disfigurement of the swollen lip.

"Can't you tell me?" said Lord Egan. "I should like to know."

"It was lies—that's all. And I *gave it to him*, I can tell you."

"Well, what were these lies?"

Luigi swung his leg backwards and forwards, hesitating. At last he spoke.

"He said I was very proud of myself, but that I needn't be, because I hadn't got even a name, and that I shouldn't have any land or anything, and that people all despised me."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. He said you were a thief. And then I knocked him down."

Lord Egan stood upon the hearth, with his hands behind him, looking across the room. After a little silence, he said—

"I don't know that you should have knocked him down, Luigi—*for it was true!*"

"Oh, come," said Luigi, with a shake of the head, "you won't get over me like that."

"It *is* true," said Lord Egan, and he began to pace the room, with his hands behind him and his eyes on the ground. "You spoke and acted in my defence," he said presently, with something in his voice that made Luigi instantly understand the matter was not a joke, "and I thank you for it—it was loyal of you, my dear boy. But—we have no right to resent these things that are said of us—none at all."

"Oh, come now, you won't get me to believe you're a thief, you know," said Luigi.

"But I am. I stole something once that I wanted very much, and that did not belong to me. I cannot explain—and you wouldn't understand if I did. But some day we

shall have to face the situation—you and I—and then it will be very hard for us both."

He did not understand as it was. He sat swinging his leg backwards and forwards, and although he was bound to believe the father whom he had never yet known deviate ever so slightly from the truth, still he felt sure there was some satisfactory explanation of the thieving episode somewhere. At present it was only that he did not fully understand.

"It will be very hard for us both," repeated Lord Egan, pacing the room slowly from end to end. "For myself, I am ready to bear the consequences of what I have done. I would not try to escape them by so much as a hair's breadth, but that you, who are innocent, should have to bear them too—that is what will be hardest of all! I would die a dozen deaths to save you from them if I could, but it is out of my hands. It always is out of our hands to avert the suffering we bring about by sin."

He came over to the boy, and paused beside him.

"I'm doing what I can now to be a better man," he said, looking down into Luigi's eyes with a great wistfulness in his own, "but at best it is but a poor story. It requires courage to face a hard lot and make the best of it. It is what you will have to do, and what I pray you may do. God give us both strength."

He laid his hands one on each side of the boy's shoulders, and stood so, looking down into his eyes.

"It will be harder for you than you know," he said, "but, however it may work out, remember this—no ignominy of birth can prevent you from being a gentleman in the true sense of the word, if you will. Whether you have a name or not, you can still be a man of courage and honour. That is my one desire with regard to you."

He looked up into his father's face—at the grave, kind eyes, the sad mouth, the dark hair, turning grey on the temples, and thought that if he were indeed disgraced, then disgrace meant something that lifted one higher than other men. His faith refused to be shaken.

"I do not ask you to forgive me," Lord Egan was saying,

"for I can never forgive myself, but I do ask you to give me your promise that you will make the best—not the worst—of this evil inheritance I have given you."

Luigi shifted uneasily under his father's hands. With a boy's shyness he had an intense dislike to anything like "scenes" or sentiment. Lord Egan saw this, and, after a moment, he dropped his hands and turned away. Besides, what was the use of extracting a promise about a thing that must mean a lifelong struggle. The difficulty must be met in another way.

He crossed the hall and went into his library. There he flung himself heavily into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"O God," he cried in an involuntary prayer, "if a broken and a contrite heart is any atonement, take it and let my son go free."

But, even as he uttered the words, he knew that they were vain. The Hand that rules the Universe knows no shadow of turning, and it has been declared that the sins of the fathers shall descend upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. The curse of Francesca Daubigny's sin was already lying on the third generation, and if the law holds good had yet to run its course in the fourth. Where would it end? That was one of those great questions the answer to which is shrouded in impenetrable mystery.

THE END.

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